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EDITORIAL

HAL SCHUSTER

HOT STUFF!

I am a calm, reserved, professional editor and publisher. In the course of a month, I am responsible for seeing that over ten publications are written, edited, typeset, designed, pasted-up, printed and shipped. During that process, thousands of little details occupy my time—from changing the syntax of a writer to competely redoing a piece that doesn't quite work, and from going over a cover design with an art director to filling in and typesetting several articles. I deal with printers, designer, writers, editors and scores of other highly professional individuals. To do so I am forced to present the front of a man who knows exactly what he is doing and where his company is going. This is the only way to deal with a banker, a color separator or a national distributor.

Last week I learned that I am also still the wild-eyed kid who avidly devours his latest comic books. The still-adolescent who thrills at the exploits of wildly garbed superheroes and villains cavorting in fantastic exploits across the four-color page lurks very near the surface, barely below that front we just talked about.

What brought this revelation about? I had lunch with Stan Lee at Shain's in Sherman Oaks. Just me with The Man. In between dribbling bits of salad dressing down my designer shirt, I bubbled over with excitement over the years of enjoyment his work had brought me, while I (successfully) attempted to convince him that he could trust his dearly beloved manuscripts to my editorial eye and publishing hand. It was a wonderful and unique experience. It was an even more important experience when after reading his manuscript I realized that there were things that I knew about my magazine that he, logically, did not, and that I could make suggestions for changes in his next column. I sent that letter off

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FEATURE NEWS

MILLER RETURNS TO MAN WITHOUT FEAR

Daredevil 226 marks the return of Frank Miller as writer of the blind crimefighter's adventures. Miller, whose dark, moody style brought acclaim to the title during his first stint as writer/artist, joins penciller Dave Mazzuchelli to form the new creative team.

Current scripter Denny O'Neil will turn over the writing chores in order to concentrate on **Iron Man** and a number of other upcoming projects.

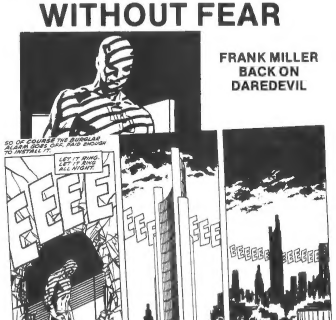
"When the possibility of my return to **Daredevil** first came up, the opportunity to team up with Dave was a real draw," Miller notes. "I feel that I'll be able to play into his wonderful command of human expression."

Miller has a number of major twists in store for the series and its players. "I've had the advantage of being away from the title for awhile," he says, "so I have a new perspective that will enable me to turn this into the Daredevil I've always wanted to do."

The main focus of the series will be the war between Daredevil and the Kingpin of Crime, he reveals, with the title stressing the crime element in a strong, New York setting. Changes will affect the entire supporting cast, and will include the return of Karen Page, Daredevil's first romantic interest, and an emotional breakdown for Matt Murdock.

Miller comments that his recent Daredevil-related work led to renewed enthusiasm and new ideas for the character. Other upcoming Miller projects include the **Elektra Graphic Novel**, which he will write and draw, the **Daredevil Graphic Novel** in collaboration with Bill Sienkiewicz, and the **Elektra** Epic Comics limited series, also in collaboration with Sienkiewicz.

"My return to Daredevil has felt like jumping into it at full run," he says. "I'm planning things that will streamline and strengthen the character, enabling me to do stories unlike anything that has ever been done before."



MARVEL RAISES PRICES

COMICS GO TO 75 CENTS

While announcing a price increase for virtually all of his company's comics, Marvel Vice-President for Publishing Mike Hobson notes: "We held the price of comics at 65 cents for as long as we could, but ever-increasing costs finally caught up with us. The time came when we simply had to react to the economic realities."

Beginning with the comics shipping in October, Marvel titles will cost 75 cents. However, Star Comics titles, Marvel annuals and specials and Epic Comics will remain at their current price levels.

Star Comics will remain 65 cents, annuals will stay at $1.25, while specials and Epic Comics will continue to cost $1.50.

In addition, the Canadian price for 75 cent comics will be reduced from the previous $1.00 level to 95 cents in order to more accurately reflect the currency exchange rate as it now stands.

Hobson points out that increased costs for color separations, overhead, art and editorial needs and all other elements involved in producing a comic contributed to the decision.

"Despite all of this, we held the price down for two years longer than our closest competitor," Hobson says with pride. "Even now, we have still managed to decrease our Canadian prices and keep the Star Comics, Epic Comics and specials at their current prices."

DC COMICS WRITERS A

"Comics books are fun, right?" DC Comics Vice President-Executive Editor Dick Giordano queries of his staff gathered in the DC conference room.

This question prompts a heated discussion. The result? DC Comics will publish a 12-issue maxi-series that is, issue after issue, page after page, panel after panel, intended to be a package of fun. It's the **DC Challenge**, alternately described as a "round robin" (Bob Greenberger, Associate Editor) or a "hot potato" (Bruce Bristow, Marketing Director).

The **DC Challenge** is this: each issue of the book is written and drawn by a different creative team; each of the 11 teams (writer, penciller, inker) tries to stump the following issue's creative team. For the 12th issue, all of the writers join in to plot and write the final installment. Teams on the books were chosen as random pairings with the rule that normal creative teams wouldn't be allowed. Other rules of the game: 1) a writer cannot use a character he usually writes. If presented with one such character by the previous writer, he must write him/her out within a few pages. 2) All cliffhangers from the previous issue must be wrapped up before the writer can create a new subplot. 2A) There must be a way out of all cliffhangers. If a writer gets "stuck," he can call on the previous writer to get him out of the trap. (So far, none of the writers have fallen to their knees to beg for plot information, though many have

MARVEL AWARDED SPECIAL PRESIDENTIAL CITATION

A Citation recognizing the contribution of Marvel Comics Group to the diminution of child abuse was presented by President Ronald Reagan to Marvel president James E. Galton at a recent White House ceremony. The award, which recognizes Marvel for its outstanding Private Sector Initiative and its dedication to "finding private solutions to critical social problems," entitles Marvel to emblazon its products with the "C" logo symbolizing "we can, we care."

"We are deeply honored to have been selected for this Special Citation," said Marvel's Galton, "and we hope to continue with programs which serve the community as beneficially as our child abuse prevention efforts. Our most cherished 'award' is the thousands of letters we've received from grateful children, parents, educators, and professionals in the field of child abuse prevention who tell us how much our program has helped, but this Presidential Citation provides another sort of gratification and is much appreciated."

The centerpiece of Marvel's child abuse prevention program is a sixteen-page comic book, developed in cooperation with the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (NCPCA), in which Spiderman and Power Pack teach children ways in which to identify, deter and cope with child sexual abuse. One million copies of the special edition have been distributed to schools, service organizations, community groups, and concerned individuals by NCPCA; millions more have been delivered into households via Sunday editions of dozens of newspapers. Marvel has supported distribution of the comic book with personal appearances by The Amazing Spider-Man at schools, day care centers, shopping malls and other sites where the popular Super Hero has delivered important preventative messages to millions of children.

HANNIGAN BECOMES DC COVER MAN

"I'm excited about this new position at DC," explains new cover editor Ed Hannigan. "We're striving to give DC Comics a better look. We want to experiment with the covers when it's warranted, giving them a newer, more exciting look. There's so much we can do with current technology, more than just painted covers. I want to produce covers that the readers will be attracted to and that they'll be proud to own—and that also are good representations of what's inside that month's issue."

Hannigan will work with Vice President-Executive Editor Dick Giordano and Art Director Richard Bruning to give covers a clearer, simpler, bolder look. He will design as well as work with editors and artists to oversee design.

"In our 50th year of publishing," notes Dick Giordano, "we're looking at everything about our books. We're re-vamping some things, eliminating others. With our covers, we're re-

evaluating the whole look—overall design, color use, logos, words. Ed will be responsible for the entire look."

Before accepting the full time position with DC Comics, Hannigan designed and drew numerous covers for both DC and Marvel. He has also worked as production manager for British Marvel titles and assistant editor doing proofreading at Marvel. He co-created Marvel characters Cloak and Dagger and has written and drawn books at various comic book companies. He worked on a freelance basis for the last 14 years.

ID ARTISTS TAKE THE CHALLENGE

gone in directions unfathomed by the previous writer.) Text pages in the printed comic book will include information on how that issue's writer would have solved the cliffhangers he created. 3) A title to the next issue must be provided. 4) You gotta have fun.

Artists have taken the **DC Challenge** as an opportunity to revive unsung heroes: Congorilla and B'Wana Beast appear in issue 2, co-plotted by Len Wein and Chuck Patton. Issue 5 writer Mike W. Barr notes, "I decided I wanted to use all the characters DC owns and I like and that I never had the chance to write before." He uses Dr. Fate, Capt. Marvel, Capt. Comet and others.

"It's been a tough project to coordinate," commented Giordano. "No one can start an issue until the previous issue has been done. Plus, for many, the project is in addition to their regular work load. That has created some problems in scheduling. We've got the first five issues ready—so we're ready to roll.

"Nothing like this has ever been done before. I can't figure out where it's going and what the aliens, demons and villains all have up their sleeves. But it's good, clean fun. I mean, when I first heard about this **DC Challenge** thing at the San Diego Comicon in 1983, I thought the guys were joking. But they take their comics—and their fun—quite seriously."

For the record, the line-up for the CHALLENGE is as follows:

1) Mark Evanier, Gene Colan, Bob Smith.
2) Len Wein, Chuck Patton, Mike DeCarlo.
3) Doug Moench, Carmine Infantino, Bob Smith.
4) Paul Levitz, Gil Kane, Klaus Janson.
5) Mike W. Barr, Dave Gibbons and Mark Farmer.
6) Elliot S. Maggin, Dan Jurgens, Larry Mahlstedt.
7) Paul Kupperberg, Joe Staton, Steve Mitchell.
8) Gerry Conway, Rick Hoberg, Dick Giordano.
9) Roy Thomas, Don Heck, Karl Kesel.
10) Dan Mishkin, Curt Swan, Terry Austin.
11) Marv Wolfman, Keith Giffen and Romeo Tanghal.
12) Everybody, George Perez, and Terry Austin.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 35

PREVIEW

BY JAMES VAN HISE

The idea is to reunite Cyclops, the Beast, Angel and Iceman as a team which, unlike the secretive new X-Men, works openly as mutant exterminators! In reality, this is a cover which allows them to aid mutants being victimized by rampant anti-mutant hysteria, as well as deal with mutants who are truly a menace.

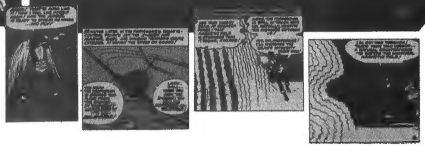
THE X

"It's the kind of idea that's been kicking around the office for a lot of years," **X-Factor** editor Michael Carlin explains. "Whenever a writer came to Marvel, invariably the first thing they wanted to do was revive the original X-Men. But Bob Layton came up with an idea, a hook, that made it stand out as not being just another superhero team. Each of Marvel's teams has a different reason for being and Layton happened to hit upon the perfect vehicle for these characters. This team needed to have something to set them apart which would be more than just the nostalgia of bringing back the original X-Men. It was Layton's hook that made Jim Shooter go with this idea."

The idea is to reunite Cyclops, the Beast, Angel and Iceman as team which, unlike the secretive new X-Men, works openly as mutant exterminators! In reality, this is a cover which allows them to aid mutants being victimized by rampant anti-mutant hysteria, as well as deal with mutants who are truly a menace. The highly recognizable Angel and Iceman will sport civilian attire and act as front men for the organization.

"Bob Layton is writing and inking," states Carlin, "with Jackson Guice as penciller."

Although a common standby in the original title, Magneto will not play a major role in **X-Factor**. "Most of the original



FACTOR

X-Men don't go for the idea of Magneto being involved with either the new X-Men or the New Mutants. They're not big fans of that idea," Carlin explains. "Think about it. If someone had been trying to kill you but their psychiatrist said that they were okay now, would you want to hang out with them? I think that it's a natural reaction."

As editor, what Carlin would like to see the book do is "get back to the flavor and the feel of the old X-Men title, primarily the Roy Thomas issues, which I know were pretty popular among the fans. These aren't Wolverine and the others. These are the original X-Men. **X-Factor** is going to be totally different from what's out right now. We're going to make this book stand on its own, although eventually there will be crossovers. We are working with the **X-Men** office on continuity but we're going to save the crossovers for a little while down the road."

The **X-Men** first appeared in the summer of 1963, right alongside the first issue of **The Avengers**. But they were and always have been a very different sort of team book. The X-Men were not a congerie of heroes from other titles but a carefully selected team gathered by the mysterious Professor X. Mutants all, they worked in secret to confront other mutants who menaced mankind. Some of those who later joined the lineup of Marvel heroes started out as their foes. Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch, a brother and sister act, fought alongside Magneto for several issues before switching sides when his unbridled brutality became too much for them. **The X-Men** continued through issue 65, ending after a string of some of the finest books in the run. Written by Roy Thomas and drawn by Neal Adams, issues 56-63 and 65 would form a paragon of excellence to aim at years later when the title was revived. Sporadic reprints followed through number 93, then the new X-Men were introduced (as a follow-up to **Giant Size X-Men 1**), on which only Cyclops and Marvel Girl remained from the original team, Eventually Jean Grey (Marvel Girl) would become Phoenix and die, precipitating Cyclops's decision to leave the group.

Other members of the original team turned up in **The Defenders** (Angel, Iceman, the Beast), but they lacked the style and flash of the old days. **Defenders** 152, the last issue in that series' run, will mark the end of one era and the beginning of another. **Avengers** 263 and **Fantastic Four** 286 will form the backdrop for the newest mutant series, one which will reunite the surviving original X-Men into a team very different from the one they started out as.

Not just another X-title, the **X-Factor** holds promise for new creative doors opening in an already crowded mutant arena.

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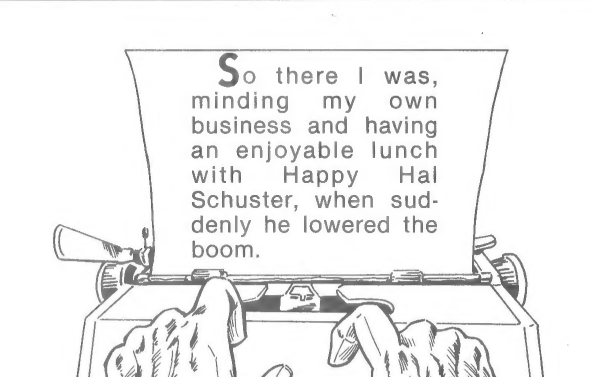
STAN LEE SOUNDS OFF


So there I was, minding my own business and having an enjoyable lunch with Happy Hal Schuster, when suddenly he lowered the boom.

Even before we could order dessert, **THE COMICS FEATURE**'s jovial publisher laid an unexpected question on me.

"How would you like to do something different?" he asked, with disarming innocence.

I figured he was gonna suggest pouring ketchup over the ice cream, or skipping out without paying the check, or some other wildly whacky feat of derring-do. But apparently I'm a lousy prophet. What he did ask me to do was the last thing I ever expected.

He asked me to write a column for this mag!

I told him he must be kidding. I mean, you readers have enough troubles now without me adding to your burden. Anyway, it's been so long since I wrote those now-historic STAN'S SOAPBOXES in every issue of Marvel Comics that I've probably forgotten how to do it. And finally, I've been out here in the halcyon hills of Hollywood working on films for the past six years, so what can I possibly say about today's comic books?

But Happy Hal was adamant. He was also a master check fumbler—I ended up paying for the lunch. So, I figured what the hell. The only way to get revenge is to write the column for him. That'll teach 'im!

After telling him I'd do it, and watching him wipe away the cascading tears of gratitude, I asked what he thought his readers (both of them) might be interested in having me write. Dexterously forking his last piece of lettuce leaf, he looked me squarely in the eye and said, "Why don'tcha explain the difference between creating characters for Marvel Comics and

The appeal of E.T. and the action of Rambo... It's FORBUSH-MAN!

creating them for Marvel Productions?"

Sounded good to me. It's better than filling up a page by typing "The Quick Brown Fox Jumped Over the Lazy Dog," even though you'd probably find that more interesting.

So, here goes. Feast ye now thine eyes upon the first new column these weary but wondrous fingers have typed in many a moon. It's been years since I've done anything like this. And once you read it you'll realize why!

Okay, let's get incredibly serious. Creating characters for comic books is probably the second most enjoyable thing you can do. (Never mind the first thing, you sex maniac!) A comic book story is almost like a confessional—it's just something between you and your editor. Once you do decide upon the character, or the idea, or the story plot you want, that's it. There's nobody else to butt in, nobody to interfere. Nobody else would dare!

But, when creating characters, concepts or plots for an animated cartoon, or even for a live-action feature film or tv series, it's inevitably done by committee. Here's an example...

You, the writer, suddenly come up with the world's most brilliant idea. It's totally original. It's never been done before. It's got the appeal of **E.T.** and the action of **Rambo**. Let's call it **Forbush-Man**.

Now then, if you bring it to a comic book editor, he'll probably be ecstatic. There's a good chance of him buying it on the spot. There's no telling what might happen—the sky's the limit. Hey, you might even catch a glimpse of Jim Shooter.

But, now let's take that same **FORBUSH-MAN** idea to a movie producer. Remember, it's totally original. It's never been done before. It's got the appeal of **E.T.** and the action of **RAMBO**. Here's what might happen...

The producer would turn thumbs down. Why? Simple. He'd have the usual Hollywood reaction.

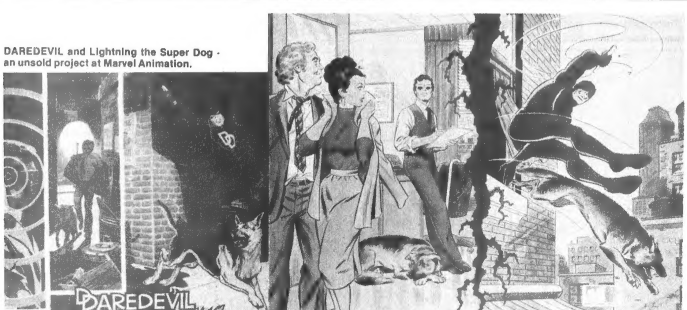
"Sorry. Can't use it. It's too original. It's never been done before. I'm not investing millions of dollars in something that's never been done before. How do I know it'll work? Also, it's too much like **E.T.** People will resent us copying Spielberg. And it's got too much action. Do you know what those action scenes will cost to shoot? Maybe Stallone could afford it in **RAMBO**. I can't."

Sure, I'll admit the above example is a little bit exaggerated. But, as anyone who's worked in the movie business will tell you, it's not far off target.

The point is, of course, that there is far greater freedom in comic books than in movies or tv. Now, that doesn't mean you can never sell anything new and exciting to film producers. It just means that it's a lot harder to do.

You see, even if the producer likes your idea, there are so many other people you have to win over, it's like running a gauntlet. No matter what your basic concept is, you can bet the screenwriter will change it so that the final script reflects his own personal style. Even if you write the screenplay yourself, it's certain that the director will make countless changes as he approaches each scene, and add so many of his own individual interpretations that your original script will be almost unrecognizable when the film finally hits the screen.

And we haven't even discussed the importance of the film editor, and the way that his cuts and splices set so



DAREDEVIL and Lightning the Super Dog - an unsold project at Marvel Animation.

much of the mood and feeling of any movie. The same with the music director, the cameraman, and the art director.

Finally, there's another group that's hardly ever mentioned, yet it exerts an enormously powerful influence over film-making. That group is the friends and relatives of the producer or producers. While nobody would dream of telling a brain surgeon or an electrical engineer how to do his job, everyone seems to feel qualified to be a movie critic. Thus, the producer's wife, kids, secretary, chauffeur, stock broker, mistress, barber and even his tennis pro will put in their oar at some time or other.

And leave us not forget the bankers. When some financial wizard is investing untold millions of greenbacks in some celluloid fable, he'll speak his mind whenever he feels like it, and when the bankers speak, Hollywood listens.

But now, let's talk for a moment about creating new ideas at Marvel Productions, our studio here in Los Angeles.

Since Marvel is our own animation studio, and I've been given the ambiguously impressive title Vice-President of Creative Affairs, it isn't all that difficult for me to push my own ideas through. Especially in light of the fact that our tremendously talented studio president, Margaret Loesch, and I are very good friends.

But, even when an idea is okayed by Maggie and myself, there's still a long road to haul before it reaches the screen. If we're planning to do a network show, then one of the three major networks must agree to purchase and pay for the show. As soon as they do that, they become the boss. The show must be produced the way they want it.

As an example, when we sold **SPIDER-MAN AND HIS AMAZING FRIENDS** to NBC, it was the network that insisted on the "amazing friends" bit. They wanted us to add Iceman and Firestar. I told them that Spidey had always been a loner, and I suggested keeping him that way. But, once again, NBC was footing the bill, so we had to do it their way.

Remember the little puppy dog in the Spider-Man show? Firestar calls her Ms. Lion. Now I yield to no man in my love for puppy dogs, or any other kind of dogs. My wife and I own five barkin' bow-wows ourselves right now; a Doberman, a Rotweiller, a Maltese Terrier, a Pomeranian and a neurotic Chihuahua. But even though we dig doggies, I never thought that Spidey desperately needed a little yapper named Ms. Lion to make his stories more enjoyable. However, NBC was the boss.

I guess the main point of this sterling little soliloquy is to tip you off to the fact that whatever you see on the screen doesn't necessarily represent what the writer or the creator really wanted to put there. I'm not saying it's better or worse, that's for posterity to judge—assuming posterity gives a damn—I'm just saying it's usually different.

And now I've got bad news for you.

Having reached the end of this exemplary little excursion into contemporary culture, I suddenly realize that I enjoyed writing it. That means I'll ask Happy Hal to let me write another one in a following issue. That means you'll have another "Speak Out" column to wrestle with just when you thought things were getting better. Well, nobody ever promised you a rose garden.

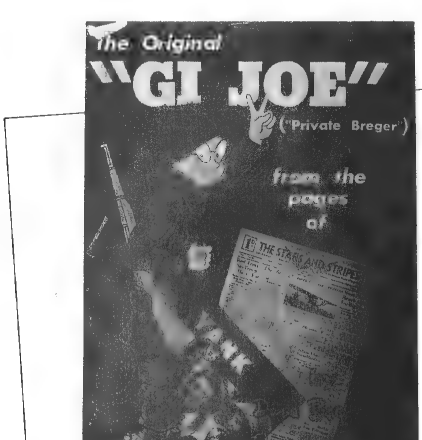
So, if Thor's golden tresses don't get caught in the She-Hulk's Mixmaster, I'll be back with you again some time to tell you the gripping saga of the creation of Marvel Production's next big superhero—**SOLARMAN!** (And wait'll you find out who wrote the lyrics for his theme song!)

Excelsior!

Stan

STRIP SEARCH

MAX ALLAN COLLINS



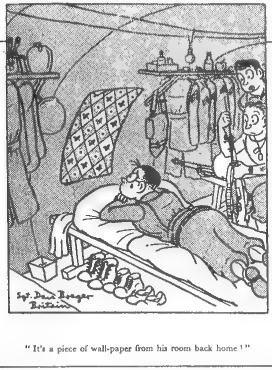
Hasbro has been making a bundle, in recent years, off its G.I. Joe doll and various related toys, not to mention animated cartoons and a widely popular Marvel comic book. The latter is probably the biggest newstand success story in Marvel's recent history. Nonetheless, it would probably come as a surprise to most of the current G.I. Joe readers to learn that the very term "G.I. JOE" was invented by a cartoonist. That it was, in fact, the name of a comic strip.

And those smug "Golden Age" fans who are expecting now a discussion of the 1950s Ziff-Davis G.I. Joe comic book, with its entertaining stories and wonderful Norman Saunders covers, guess again.

What we're here to discuss today is the first G.I. JOE, the real G.I. JOE, and his identical twin, PRIVATE BREGER. The creator of both G.I. JOE and PRIVATE BREGER (actually the same character, but more about that later) was David Breger, who was born in 1908 in Chicago to Russian immigrant stock. Although he earned a degree in abnormal psychology at Northwestern University (certainly sound training for any cartoonist), he continued to work, on and off, at his father's sausage factory (where he is said to have developed a slogan: OUR WURST IS THE BEST). This blue-collar work experience gave Breger an affinity for the common man, and his tiny, freckled, bespectacled cartoon character—who looked vaguely like a bug—would always be a put-upon Everyman, whichever of his several names he was going by at the time. (Despite naming his character after himself—PRIVATE BREGER became MR. BREGER after the war—the character drawn was not really a caricature of the cartoonist himself, who was a pleasant looking, rather heavy-set man with a round face.)

Breger interrupted a blossoming career

" Arrange these documents alphabetically and then burn them ! "



" It's a piece of wall-paper from his room back home ! "

as a gag cartoonist for the likes of **Liberty** and **Collier's** to enter the Armed Forces in 1941. That very year, he somehow managed to fulfill his duties as a U.S. Army Private and turn out a cartoon, based on his own service experiences; as war artist John Groth put it, "(Breger) could have taken it 'easy,' if anyone can possibly take it easy as a G.I., and not stayed up drawing his cartoons in a camp bakery shop which was the only place where the lights were on all night; nor did he have to draw his cartoons by the light in the cab of an ordinance truck, but he did." His hard work paid off; PRIVATE BREGER was sold first to **The Saturday Evening Post,** and then to King Features.

At this point it should be noted that the Second World War saw the creation, and the wide popularity among both servicemen and civilians, of a number of soldier-oriented cartoons. Notable among these are Milton Caniff's **Male Call,** Bill Maudlin's **Up Front** ("Willie and Joe") and prehaps the quintessential serviceman strip, George Baker's **The Sad Sack.** Dave Breger's G.I. JOE enjoyed a popularity and fame easily equal to the others. In fact, G.I. JOE and Sad Sack both appeared in the Armed Forces publication **Yank,** the former playing Chaplin to the latter's Keaton.

G.I. JOE (Government Issue" Joe—his last name was "Trooper") was indeed none other than PRIVATE BREGER under another name. Just as Milton Caniff had to flesh out Male Call with a non—**Terry and the Pirates** cast (and beautifully fleshed out it was), Breger was unable to bring the civilian-distributed version of his dogface to the pages of **Yank,** which by policy was filled strictly by the work of enlisted men, done specifically for the magazine. Later, when Breger was commissioned a second lieutenant, he (as he himself put it) "collided head-on with the basic policy of **Yank**: 'By Enlisted Men Only.'" So G.I. JOE moved over to **Stars and Stripes,** the Army daily newspaper distributed in the European Theater of Operations, where the strip appeared till the spring of 1944.

Breger, in being asked to come up with a new name for a character he'd already christened in another manner, inadvertently coined a phrase that has (Breger's own words again) "become representative of the American soldier everywhere." The term passed into public use and public domain, and neither Ziff-Davis nor Hasbro have ever had to pay a penny to the creator of G.I. JOE (or his estate—Breger died in 1970).

Breger was a first-rate cartoonist; his style was original, angular but always well-designed. The only overt influence that can be readily detected is James Thurber, but Breger was a tighter, more controled cartoonist than Thurber, though at the same time similarly fluid. Still, his drawing style was idosyncratic enough to be judged harsh by the average eye, and his humor was often absurd enough to confound the literal minded. The harshness and absurdity of the war years, then, provided a perfect backdrop for Breger's skewed world view; but—like George Baker— his popularity would not transfer into the homogenized postwar atmosphere.

(Baker's comic strip version of SAD SACK was a relative failure; this may have been due to the public rejection of the Sack in civies—although the syndicator, Bell, was a third-rate outfit, which didn't help—and the success of the long-running Harvey comic book was marked by a return to Army life for Sad Sack. It should be noted that the comic version was largely Fred Rhoads' work, though Baker did contribute covers until his death in 1975.)

Given a third (and final) name, G.I. JOE/PRIVATE BREGER became

YOU HAVE BEEN SELECTED TO SHARE IN J. STUYVESANT MONEYBELT'S BILLION DOLLARS... PLEASE CALL AT THE MONEYBELT RESIDENCE FOR YOUR AMOUNT....
NO KIDDIN'!
YAHOOOOO! IT'S HAPPENED! WE SHARE J. MONEYBELT'S BILLION DOLLARS! I'M RUSHIN' OVER TO COLLECT NOW!

We still can't figure it out!"

MISTER BREGER, and continued on in panel form into the 1960s; a Sunday page, comic-strip format version appeared concurrently and outlasted the panel that spawned it, dying with Breger in 1970. It is unfair to write MISTER BREGER off as a SAD SACK-like failure; it was not. for nearly twenty-five postwar years, it chugged respectably along.

But G.I. JOE(a.k.a. PRIVATE BREGER) was a superstar of such proportions that his name passed into the language.

Several hardcover collections of PRIVATE BREGER and G.I. JOE were published, and—like the SAD SACK and "Willie and Joe" collections—were enormously successful. In his later years, Breger also published the respected **How to Draw and Sell Cartoons** (1966), a lavishly illustrated, wittily anecdotal but very practical "basic reference work" on cartooning (to quote Bill Blackbeard).

Breger also contributed what might be seen as a panel cartoonist's rebuttal to Dr. Wertham's SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT. His book BUT THAT'S UNPRINTABLE (1954) combines typically funny, acid Breger anecdotes and opinions with 136 previously unpublished, censored (until then) cartoons—including a particularly sexy Milton Caniff MALE CALL. Although Breger, in BUT THAT'S UNPRINTABLE, quite bitterly denounces most comic books (always referring to them as "comic" books), he attacks the repressive atmosphere that allows all comics and cartoons to be smeared with the same dirty brush. (One suspects his dislike of comic books may have been related to the unauthorized-by-him Ziff-Davis G.I. JOE comic book, which was quite violent.) Underlying all this is Breger's frustration with the pap that dominated '50s popular culture; this was, after all, his downfall, as the rather uncensored and freeswinging (and harsh and absurd) cartoons that had made him and his character famous made them both seem out of step in the era of Ike.

A new collection of Breger's best work (and to be fair to him, it should include some of his postwar efforts as well) is long overdue. His PRIVATE BREGER and G.I. JOE cartoons capture the spirit of what it must have been like to be a rookie in W.W.2. Certainly it's easy to understand why the average "dogface" came to view G.I. JOE. as a symbol of Every Soldier. Consider Breger's prime target: blustering, privileged officers with their jutting jaws and squiggly mustaches, and the bureaucracy they swim in—"Arrange these documents alphabetically and then burn them!" an officer commands Joe. (Colonel Cole, whose jaw jutted the most and whose mustache was even more squiggly than the other officers', became civilian Breger's boss come peacetime; cartoonist Breger worked over money-hungry capitalists with the same satiric blackjack he'd used on bureaucrats.)

But Breger also had heart; and he never forgot that most soldier were former civilians anxious to be civilians again. One poignant cartoon—not at all funny— merely shows Private Breger on his cot staring at a hunk of wallpaper from home tacked to the "wall" in his tent. One typically absurd Breger cartoon shows Joe receiving his morning New York paper and fresh bottle of milk just outside his pup tent, while confused officers look on ("We still can't figure it out!"). Breger's quiet surrealism, in such cartoons, is as dry as the best **New Yorker** cartoonists.

The format of G.I. JOE did vary from PRIVATE BREGER somewhat; the latter was a standard panel cartoon. G.I. JOE was an array of panels, all pertaining to the same subject. One particularly memorable series (which ran weeks on

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HEROES

BY JAMES VAN HISE

The dual nature of man has been explored in literature many ways throughout history. In the field of fantasy, the most prominent examples are Robert Louis Stevenson's **Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde** and the legend of the werewolf as found in the motion picture lore of Universal Studios and Lon Chaney Jr.

Stan Lee chose to explore the theme with a character who had a true split personality. The Hulk was the second new character that Lee came up with after successfully launching **The Fantastic Four.**

In describing the birth of the Hulk in **The Origins of Marvel Comics** (Simon & Schuster, 1974), Lee remarked, "Think of the challenge it would be to make a hero out of a monster. We would have a protagonist with superhuman strength, but he wouldn't be all-wise, all-noble, all-infallible. (How's **that** for a rollicking redundancy?) We would use the concept of the Frankenstein monster, but update it. Our hero would be a scientist, transformed into a raging behemoth by a nuclear accident. And—since I was willing to borrow from Frankenstein, I decided I might as well borrow from Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde as well—our protagonist would constantly change from his normal identity to his superhuman alter ego and back again."

The Incredible Hulk 1 (May, 1962) introduced both the Hulk and Rick Jones, a teenage companion. While youthful sidekicks were popular over at DC in those days, Stan Lee didn't like the idea of using one as they mostly tagged along and got into trouble. So why Rick Jones?

Says Lee, "He was a necessary catalyst in the creation of the Hulk, and he also gave me a chance to demonstrate that it was possible to introduce a teenager into a comic book series without making him a cloying, simpy extension of the hero's personality. Remember, at Marvel we like to do things differently."

If there's anything that **The Incredible Hulk** was, it was unusual. Perhaps too unusual at that moment to sustain such a

All visuals : Marvel Comics

" IN THE LONG RUN IT MIGHT WELL HAVE BEEN BETTER IF BRUCE BANNER HAD DIED THAT DAY.
" CERTAINLY IT COULD HAVE BEEN LITTLE WORSE THAN WHAT DID HAPPEN.
" NO FORCE HAD EVER BEEN UNLEASHED THAT COULD EQUAL THAT OF THE GAMMA BOMB.
" IT TORE OUT OF ITS TEST SHAFT LIKE A THING ALIVE, AND BLASED BRUCE BANNER WITH ENOUGH PURE GAMMA RADIATION TO KILL A THOUSAND PEOPLE INSTANTLY.
WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME?!?

title character. The comic was very much in the style and manner of the weird SF titles that Marvel was still doing at the time. With the first five issues drawn by Jack Kirby, the ambience was, if anything, reinforced. Plus the name The Hulk had already been used for a monster in two issues of **Journey Into Mystery** only a few months before. When Lee talks about agonizing over the perfect name for the character, he really didn't have far to look.

The initial six-issue run looked for all the world like a weird monster comic rather than an offbeat superhero. The covers emphasized the horrific aspects of the character, mentioning the word "monster" on numbers one and four. "The Terror of the Toad Men" is emblazoned on the second issue, the Army shoots at a beserk Hulk on the cover of issue three and "Mongu!! Gladiator from Space!" appears on number four. The non-human aspects are emphasized on every cover. Kids loved it. Parents questioned a misshapen hero. To them, an issue of **Batman** guest-starring Ace the Bathound looked more appealing. And parents still carefully chose what comics they bought for their little cherubs.

IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN....

The origin of the Hulk is now well known. During the initial test of a gamma bomb invented by Bruce Banner, the scientist spots someone on the proving grounds. He quickly drives there and throws teenager Rick Jones to safety in a trench before the bomb detonates. But Banner is nailed by the blast in a scene reminiscent of the movie, **The Amazing Colossal Man** (1957). The radiation has a delayed effect, turning him into the Hulk.

If one looks back on what had been done in the genre immediately prior to the first appearance of the comic, we can detect influences Stan Lee drew from. He didn't pull the idea out of thin air. No one ever does. Each idea is built upon the foundation of an earlier inspiration. Sometimes it's as simple as a word used

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DISNEY COMES TO SATURDAY

BY JAMES VAN HISE

One name which has never been connected with a Saturday morning slot is Walt Disney Studios. Their cartoons have largely been made to play in movie theatres, and those few which weren't were made for their long-running (until last year) tv show **Walt Disney Presents**. But by the time of the demise of the series (which managed a stint on all three tv networks), Disney was already offering its own cable tv channel which telecast part reruns and part new live-action programming. Despite the high profile popularity of Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse, Pluto and the rest of the gang, they never shared the network stage with Bugs Bunny, the Super-Friends or the Herculoids. Until now.

For the first time in the studio's history, Walt Disney Pictures will create animated programming for Saturday morning television. Production is already underway on two half-hour series, **The Gummi Bears** and **The Wuzzles**. The two shows will premiere Saturday mornings in September 1985 on two different networks.

The Gummi Bears, which will be aired on NBC, is an adventure-comedy series concerning a mythical race of bears who emerge from their secret warrens to help a young boy combat evil in the enchanted realm of Dunwyn.

The Wuzzles, which will be aired on CBS, chronicles the fanciful exploits of a group of unique characters who possess the traits and looks of two animals in one. These include Bumblelion (a bumblebee and a lion), Butterbear (Butterfly and bear) and Rhinokey (rhinoceros and a monkey). Sounds more like a post-nuclear mutant cartoon adventure, but then it's amazing what they can do these days.

Gary Krisel is Disney's executive in charge of Saturday morning animation. Krisel is President of Walt Disney Music Company, and will continue to serve

All V.auals © Disney

Gummi Bears & Wuzzles are Disney's new entries into the Saturday morning cartoon arena.

simultaneously in that post.

Michael Websert, Director of Television Animation Production, will be responsible for all aspects of the production of both Saturday morning programs. Webster has produced animated children's programming in New York, Tokyo and London for all three networks.

Jeffrey Katzenberg, President of Motion Pictures and Television for Walt Disney Productions, stated that "Disney is committed to becoming a major presence in Saturday morning animation programming. We are assembling some of the most creative talents in television and animation for these two ambitious projects, as well as for other series that are currently in development."

One of the writers on **The Wuzzles** is Mark Evanier, creator of the **DNAgents** comic book and contributor to Saturday morning cartoons for several years.

In describing the island locale of **The Wuzzles**, Evanier explained, "The island is a very bizarre place where everything is half and half. They grow potatotomatoes (it's all one word) and when you make French Fries out of them they already have ketchup on them. There are birds that are called bramabullfinches who are half bull and half finch. When they land on your roof, they collapse it. It's a strange place with all these weird creatures running around."

The animation was awarded to the Tokyo company, TMS, (which last year did **The Might Orbots)** after extensive auditions by practically every company in the business. Each firm was given the same scene to animate and TMS won hands down. Evanier explains that, "They're doing a spectacular job because the honor of being the Disney sub-contracting house means a lot."

The animation was contracted out because Disney Studios have no facilities to do it as quickly as was necessary for a weekly series. Thirteen half-hour episodes are being produced for the first season, which premieres in September.

Whether **The Wuzzles** and **The Gummi Bears** continue and spawn additional Disney Saturday morning fare depends on a number of factors. Besides Evanier, other writers on the show include David Wiemers and Ken Koontz. The writing, storyboards, voices, character designs and key backgrounds are all done by Disney. More of the show is being produced in this country than is average when something is subcontracted to an overseas animation house.

While not on the studio lot itself, the production office for Disney's Saturday morning shows is not far away, near Universal Studios. The entire Disney animation department was itself relocated to Glendale to make room for expanded production of non-animation projects on the main lot.

"The recurring villain who is in about half the episodes of **The Wuzzles** is an island con artist named King Crok. He has two sidekicks, one named Flizard and the other Brat. King Crok doesn't believe in working for a living so he sponges off the other people, coerces them into doing his jobs for him," Evanier continues.

"It's a funny show. It's a comedy but there's adventure in it on this crazy island where nothing is quite normal. It's a wonderful show for schizophrenics," Mark quips.

The Wuzzles also features some of the finest voice artists working in Hollywood today. Stan Freberg, who in the Sixties moved from comedy albums into writing humorous tv commercials, is the show's narrator. Freberg's voice work in cartoons dates back to the Forties when he was the voice of the huge,

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SILVER AGE

BY WILL JACOBS AND GERARD JONES

THE MARVEL MAINSTREAM

Marvel's established heroes, on the whole, fared better than DC's in the early 1970s. While DC seemed to orient its series either towards the elite of fandom or toward the youngest and least discriminating of readers, Marvel continued cultivating the loyalty of its body of adolescent "true believers." The success of a new company-run fan club called Friends of Old Marvel (FOOM) in 1973 exceeded that of the old M.M.M.S. So much that the size and loyalty of Marveldom Assembled was greater than ever before. With such support, Marvel's mainstream titles continued to sell respectably, and less importance was placed on exploring new genres.

New ways were found to market the old heroes. **Marvel Team-Up** (premiering March 1972 and based on DC's **Brave and Bold**) featured Spider-Man in pairings with other Marvel characters; **Marvel Two-In-One** (Jan. 1974), followed with the Thing cast in the role of host. Both were uneven series, but succeeded on the strength of their stars' popularity. Next came **Giant-Size Super-Stars** (May 1974), an oversized comic offering adventures of the Fantastic Four outside their usual continuity; soon followed by giant-sized versions of nearly every popular Marvel title, particularly the superhero series, including a revived **X-Men**. Spider-Man gained more exposure in **Spidey Super-Stories**, (Oct. 1974), tied in with television's educational **Electric Company** and geared to young children..In 1976, yet another Spider-Man title, **Spectacular Spider-Man**, would join the ranks as part of a new explosion of Marvel titles; it is still a regular companion to **Amazing Spider-Man.** For Marvel, at least, the shaky years of the early 1970's had passed, with the promise of a new boom on its way. (The company's optimism was enough to embolden Chip Goodman, son of Marvel's original publisher, to launch a comics company of his own, Seaboard, which would bear the pre-Marvel house name "Atlas". Edited by Stan Lee's brother Larry Lieber and releasing new creations by such popular artists as Steve Ditko and Howard Chaykin, it was an ambitious project that was fated to end in failure.)

However, the cost of Marvel's success proved to be complacency. A "house style" of story and art spread through the company, creating a unified line of passably entertaining comics, if often bland and occasionally tedious. The approved story-telling style was a synthesis of the approaches of Lee-Kirby and Lee-Ditko. Each story seemed to have a formulaic ratio of action to

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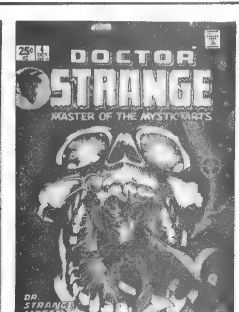

Neal Adams and Frank Brunner were responsible for many Marvel comics of the early '70s

emotional sub-plots; never as much combat as an old **FF**, never as much melodrama as an old **Spider-Man**. Steeped in the Marvel mythology, the scripting itself generally derived from Roy Thomas' style of florid description and high emotionalism. A great emphasis was placed on having each strip interact with every other—promoting unbroken company continuity. Guest appearances were demanded of every character, creating such spectacles as a battle between the Man-Thing and the throughly urban Daredevil. Over all, the Marvel heroes maintained an even, if unexciting, course.

The art was equally even, but equally bland and umimpressive. The workhorses were John Buscema, whose style became steadily sloppier and less imaginative as he turned out more work, and his brother Sal, who had a strong sense of plotting and forward motion but little originality or finesse. Along with a legion of imitators, they forged a Marvel look that seemed to combine the least impressive work of Jack Kirby and an earlier John Buscema. The pages were laid out in straight comic-strip manner, usually containing the standard six panels per page. The backgrounds were sparse. The figures were clunky and void of emotional nuance. The inking was laid on by innumerable hands in styles usually derived from the heavy, cumbersome lines of Frank Giacoia and Joe Sinnott.

Marvel's overall packaging fared even worse than DC's. Rather than have the artist of a title do his own cover, one of a few cover artists was usually pulled in to impose Marvel's new, uniform, "cover look." Covers were busy and heavy on action, usually so crowded with motion and written blurbs that they appeared painfully cramped and messy; this trend reached its peak in 1971 when huge logos and colorful frames squeezed the illustrations into the bottom half of each cover. Prehaps the clearest sign of Marvel's artistic troubles in those years lies in the innumerable covers drawn for them by Gil Kane. His talent for action had always lent itself to solid, dynamic cover art—but at Marvel his work looked so hastily executed, so badly inked, and so restricted by the new format that it only underscored the general ugliness of the line.

Much of this uniformity of art and story was due to the fact that Marvel, even as it expanded exponentially, continued under a **single** editor until late in the 1970's. Stan Lee retained his position as sole Editor until 1972, when Martin Goodman moved on to other publishing concerns and Lee took over as Publisher; he gave up writing at the same time, pouring his attention into creating a line of full-size magazines and, later, into gaining a foothold in the Saturday morning TV market. Roy Thomas naturally inherited all his duties, but found the job too stressful and unrewarding. Thomas returned to full-time writing in 1974, relinquishing the position of Editor to former DC writer Len Wein. Wein also stayed only a short time, and was replaced by his friend and colleague Marv Wolfman, who turned the job over to Archie Goodwin in 1976. Except for a few series written and edited by the same man, the current Editor generally ran the creative end of the whole company. By the time DC's multiple editor system was finally adopted in 1978, the Marvel style was solidly entrenched.

The dominant movement during the first years of the new decade was an elaboration and unification of the Marvel mythos forged by Lee and Kirby during the mid-1960's. Lee himself departed in good style by contributing a quartet of epics in the old-fashioned Marvel mode. Lee set Thor on a quest to

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LOOKING BACK ON THE GOLDEN AGE

By Ron Goulart

BECAUSE BILLY BATSON, THE BOY RADIO REPORTER, IS A SMART, BRAVE YOUNG FELLOW, AN AGED SORCERER CHOSE HIM TO CARRY ON THE FIGHT AGAINST THE WORLD'S EVILS. HE GAVE HIM THE MAGIC WORD, "SHAZAM", WHICH TRANSFORMS YOUNG BILLY INTO THE WORLD'S MIGHTIEST MAN, CAPTAIN MARVEL.
THE STRANGE POWER CREATES MANY DANGERS FOR YOUNG BILLY AND ONLY A VERY COURAGEOUS LAD COULD CARRY ON — FOR THERE ARE COUNTLESS TERRIBLE ENEMIES WHOSE GREATEST JOY WOULD BE TO PUT AN END TO CAPTAIN MARVEL!
Capt. MARVEL
SHAZAM!™

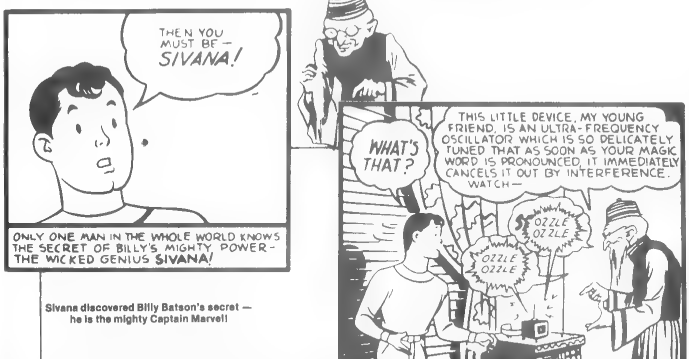
The most popular and bestselling superhero of the Forties was not the pioneering Superman but rather a redclad upstart who didn't even take his profession seriously. Captain Marvel, the joint creation of cartoonist C.C. Beck and editor-writer Bill Parker, came along in 1940 and within a very few years was outselling not only Superman but every other crimefighter, from Amazing Man to the Zebra, who'd followed in the wake of the Man of Steel.

Late in 1939 Roscoe K. Fawcett of Fawcett Publications, Inc. sent out a promotion piece to magazine distributors across the country. It announced the impending debut of **Whiz Comics**, which would star Captain Marvel—"another character sensation in the comic field!" Up until then the Fawcett folks had been known for such magazines as **Real Life Story, Motion Picture** and **Mechanix Illustrated**. Now they were promising wholesalers a comic book, one that was "here to stay." The forthcoming title would lead the parade and bring "permanent profits." In this case the advance hyperboie proved to be true.

Superman, who'd come along in the spring of 1938, had the field pretty much to himself for nearly a year, until Batman swooped into view in the spring of 1939. By the end of that year the new profession of costumed comic book crimefighter was represented on the newsstands by the Blue Beetle, Amazing Man, Sub-Mariner, the Flame, the Green Mask, the Wizard and the Human Torch. Wonder Man had also been there and gone. The first issue of **Whiz** had a cover date of February, 1940 and in that same magazine month DC introduced the Spectre and MLJ Steel Sterling. Captain Marvel moved into a leading position fairly early on and managed to stay there until well into the Forties in spite of continually increasing competition.

Originally the redclad hero's name was Captain Thunder and he was going to be the leader of a pack of heroes. According to Ralph Daigh, then Editorial Director, Parker's initial suggestion was "that our superhero feature a team, probably four, under the command of one hero Bill Iden-

Art visuals © DC Comics


THEN YOU MUST BE — SIVANA!
ONLY ONE MAN IN THE WHOLE WORLD KNOWS THE SECRET OF BILLY'S MIGHTY POWER — THE WICKED GENIUS SIVANA!
WHAT'S THAT?
THIS LITTLE DEVICE, MY YOUNG FRIEND, IS AN ULTRA-FREQUENCY OSCILLATOR WHICH IS SO DELICATELY TUNED THAT AS SOON AS YOUR MAGIC WORD IS PRONOUNCED, IT IMMEDIATELY CANCELS IT OUT BY INTERFERENCE. WATCH—
OZZLE
OZZLE
OZZLE
OZZLE

Sivana discovered Billy Batson's secret — he is the mighty Captain Marvel!

tified as 'Captain Thunder.' The 'Captain' was to have a squad of lieutenants, each possessing a singular attribute traceable to such as Hercules, Atlas, Zeus, Achilles and Mercury." Eventually that notion was voted down. And Parker, perhaps prodded by the Fawcett staff, came up with a variation of the dual-identity-multiple personality theme. It was a variation as powerful as that of Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde, Zorro and Superman. Because despite the fact that Captain Marvel was the World's Mightiest Mortal, it was Billy Batson who dominated, albeit in a quiet and self-effacing way, the stories. They were, after all, about a teenage boy who had the power to change into a fullblown superhero. It was always to his own identity that Billy returned when the danger was over and the trouble had passed.

The adventures had such a tremendous appeal to kids because they were about a kid who could take a shortcut to adulthood when he needed help with a serious problem. Billy became, in a sense, his own tough big brother or ideal father. And all it took was a magic word, not years of growing up and not even the months of exercise Charles Atlas needed to turn you from put-upon weakling to no-crap-from-anybody muscleman. That Billy was in charge is further evidenced by the fact that Cap always said, "Shazam!" when his work was done, allowing Billy to become his true self once again.

There was also great visual appeal to the adventures. This was provided by Beck, who'd been working for Fawcett as a staff cartoonist since the middle 1930s. A cantankerous gentleman with a strong sense of humor, Beck was influenced not by serious illustration but by comic strips such as **Little Orphan Annie, The Gumps** and, especially, **Barney Google**. "The basis I go on is never put in a single line that isn't necessary," he's said. Don't try to show off." His Captain Marvel stories exemplified his philosophy and were models of simplicity, clarity and design. They were fun to look at as well as read.

The captain's looks were based on those of Fred MacMurray, one of the most successful comedy leading men of the late Thirties and Forties. The costume, particularly in its earliest buttoned tunic phase, was adapted from that of a typical light opera soldier. We'd best mention here the fact that over the years the notion that Captain Marvel was modeled on an actual movie role played by MacMurray has grown up. "Another theory has it that the Captain Marvel character evolved from a dream sequence in an old Fred MacMurray motion picture, a lampoon of Superman," is how one fanzine put it in the early 1970s. The theory was given official sanction in 1977 in the hardcover collection **Shazam! From the Forties to the Seventies**. The introduction states "and possibly inspired by a dream sequence in which the star became a kind of superhero, Beck modeled Captain Thunder on Fred MacMurray." As a matter of fact, MacMurray does show up in a movie dream sequence spoofing Superman and looking somewhat like Captain Marvel. The only trouble is, this particular movie, **No Time For Love**, wasn't filmed until the middle of 1942 and was released early in 1943. A bit late to have inspired Beck back in 1939. Scripted by Claude Binyon and directed by Mitchel Leisen, **No Time For Love** teamed MacMurray with Claudette Colbert. the comedy shows up now and then on late shows, but usually with Colbert's surrealistic dream cut.

The captain was fortunate in having one of comics' most appealing villains to tangle with. The equal of the Joker, the Penguin and Luthor, Sivana was there from the start to plague and bedevil him. And he made more return engagements than just about any other bad guy in the field. In the first two dozen issues of **Whiz**, for example, the diminutive and hairless mad scientist appears no less than eleven times. He is also on view in **Special Edition Comics**, the 1940 Captain Marvel oneshot, and in the first issue of **Captain Marvel Adventures**. He recurred in this title nearly fifty more times during its twelve year run.

Sivana possessed several qualities that contributed to his being a man you love to

LET US PEER INTO THE SECRET LABORATORY OF DR. SIVANA, THE GREATEST ENEMY OF CIVILIZATION EVER KNOWN AS HE REPEATS A DREAD VOW:
I VOW TO WEAR THAT CROWN YET SOMEHOW--SOMEDAY--I'LL ACHIEVE AMBITIOUS RULER OF THE UNIVERSE!
HEH, HEH, HEH!

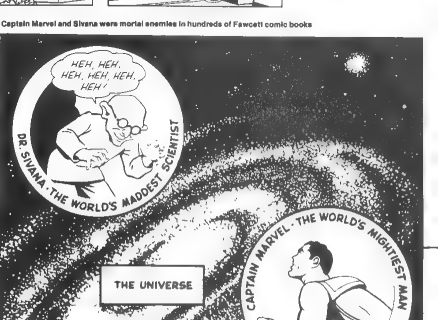
THE WORLD'S MADDEST SCIENTIST HAS NEVER GIVEN UP THIS ALL-CONSUMING AMBITION, BUT THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN ONE GREAT STUMBLING BLOCK
CURSES! HOW CAN I RAN OUT WITH THAT BIG RED LOUT, CAPTAIN MARVEL, AGAINST ME? HE SMASHES MY BEST PLOTS EVERY TIME, RAN!
THE LABORATORY

AND I CAN'T EVER GET BILLY BATSON, THE BOY THAT CAPTAIN MARVEL CHANGES BACK INTO? EVERY TIME I GO FOR BILLY, HE SOMEHOW CHANGES TO CAPTAIN MARVEL IN TIME!
BLAM!
ZING
BOOM

AND CAPTAIN MARVEL CAN'T BE DEFEATED -- NOT WITH THOSE POWERS FROM SIX ELDER HEROES, GRANTED TO HIM BY SHAZAM, THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN WIZARD! RAH, RAH!
SOLOMON-WISDOM
HERCULES-STRENGTH
ATLAS-STAMINA
ZEUS-POWER
ACHILLES-COURAGE
MERCURY-SPEED

WAIT! THAT GIVES ME A GREAT IDEA! THE ONE WAY TO CRUSH CAPTAIN MARVEL IS THROUGH SHAZAM! I'VE GOT TO FIND A SHAZAM HIMSELF AND WORK ON HIM! HEH, HEH, HEH!

Captain Marvel and Sivana were mortal enemies in hundreds of Fawcett comic books



hate. He was appealingly nasty, enormously enthusiastic in his villainy. He was eloquent, especially in his denunciations of Captain Marvel, cunning and intriguingly circumlocutious in his schemes. Only Rube Goldberg equalled him in constructing complex devices for performing simple chores. And, personifying one of our most sacred American ideals, Sivana didn't know the meaning of defeat. Thwarted issue after issues, seemingly completely destroyed on occasion, he doggedly bounced back. He had a brilliant mind, too, and there were times when you almost had to admit he was a lot smarter than Cap.

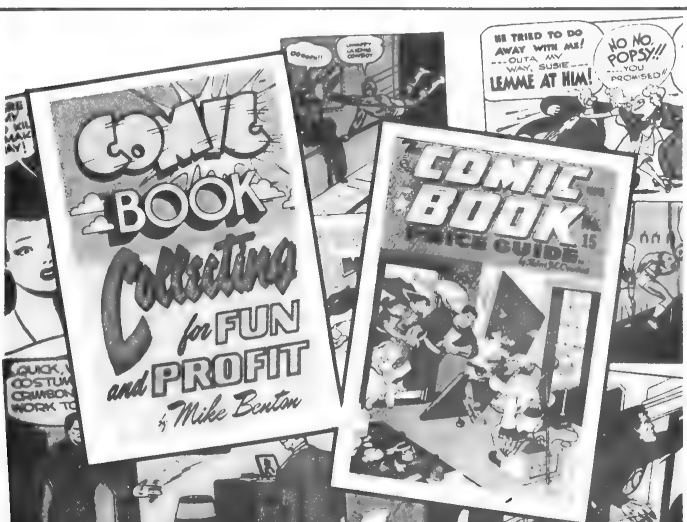
Unlike the vast majority of rather dense comic book villains who never tumbled to the true identities of their superheroic opponents, Sivana realized almost at once that Captain Marvel and Billy Batson were one and the same. He also figured out early on that if he could prevent Billy from uttering the magic word, he wouldn't be bothered by his big redciad nemesis at all. The fiendish scientist became privy to Billy's important secret in the third issue of **Whiz**. In his capacity of radio reporter Billy persuades bearded scientist Xerxes Smith to let him tag along on what is supposedly the very first rocket ship flight to Venus. The two have just stepped out of the ship on the distant planet when "a Venusian dragon charges them." Wisely, Billy hollers "Shazam!" and is transformed into Captain Marvel. After the dragon has been taken care of, the bearded little professor exclaims, "But—but you were a boy a minute ago." The captain replies, "Someday I'll tell you about it. Maybe."

You can imagine Captain Marvel's chagrin when he learns, as we suspected all along, that it is "really Sivana, mad scientist of destruction and Captain Marvel's deadliest foe" behind those craggy false whiskers. In the very next issue, with everybody back on Earth, Sivana takes advantage of his new knowledge. He has his henchmen grab and gag Billy before he can utter the magic word. A caption informs us that "Sivana is the only person on Earth" who knows of Billy's double identity. Despite this significant edge, Sivana was somehow never able to keep Billy permanently silenced. Captain Marvel always appeared, sooner or later, to give him his comeuppance. In later years, by the way, Billy grew increasingly indiscreet about uttering the special word, often saying it in front of witnesses.

CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE as we learn about all of the other Marvels, the loves of the Captain and still more about Sivana and the other villains.

FUN & PROFIT

BY MIKE BENTON


COMIC BOOK Collecting for FUN and PROFIT by Mike Benton
COMIC BOOK PRICE GUIDE
HE TRIED TO DO AWAY WITH ME! ---OUTA MY WAY, SUBIE--- LEMME AT HIM!
NO NO, POPS!!! ...YOU PROMISED

The young man held an acid-free comic collector's box under his arm as he scrutinized every new comic book that had arrived at the comic book specialty store this week. He carefully selected three copies of the same title, examined them for nicks or bumps, and then dropped them into the box.

He was buying at least two to five copies of almost every title, and finally he had his box full. His bill at the counter for that week came to $83.

He lifted the box, and then told the owner of the store that he would be in the next week. "And next time, I'm going to bring back some of the comics I've been buying," he confided. "I think it's time to start getting back my investment."

As he left the store, the owner turned to me. "God, I hope I'm not here when he brings that junk back to me. I can't stand to see a grown man cry."

There is a lesson here for everyone who buys and collects new comic books, and it is a difficult one for most collectors and investors to learn: All Comic Books Are Not Created Equal.

An enormous amount of confusion exists about Money and Comic Books. Some of the misunderstanding collectors have about buying and selling comics is due, in no small part, to overblown publicity about high-dollar comics and the naive willingness to accept every price in the **Comic Book Price Guide** as unalterable truth.

First, let's realize one thing: comic books are produced to entertain, just like television, movies and popular music. People buy and want comic books purely because they give pleasure and enjoyment.

Now just like many other objects that give pleasure, comic books are also saved and collected. People save and collect record albums because they replay them. People originally saved and collected comic books because they wanted to reread and enjoy them.

Consequently, a consumable and disposable form of temporary entertain-

Howard the Duck was a big disappointment to many investors. First it was a very hot title—then it was a big loser.
Superman's early issues are true classics.

ment—the comic book—slowly became a "collectible." Like all collectibles, comic books gradually had prices affixed to them. If one comic book gave me more pleasure than another one, then it also became "worth" more than another comic book. Simple enough.

The problem starts when people start confusing the price of a collectible with the collectible itself.

For example, there is absolutely, positively no way that owning and reading **Marvel Comics** 1 will give $38,000 worth of pleasure. I mean if I want to have a good old entertaining diversion, I'll spend 38 grand on a few boat trips, a fine sports car and as many fawning wenches as my libido can handle. No way would I trade all that for a fifty year old comic book.

The only reason any sane person would spend hundreds or thousands of dollars for a comic book is the belief that the money can be regained when the book is resold to another collector.

Unfortunately, this same type of reasoning is leading many younger collectors to buy heavily of recent comics since they think that they too will be able to resell their collection—eventually—for more than they paid for it.

The truth is that with only a few exceptions, all comic books published in the last twenty years are in abundant supply. They will continue to be in abundant supply because they were bought and saved in large quantities by collectors, dealers and speculators, and there will always be enough of them to fulfill the collectors' demand.

What's more, the demand for many of these current comics will actually **decline** over time. Why is that?

For one thing, there are so many new comics published, collectors gradually lose interest in trying to maintain or complete a collection back beyond maybe three to five years.

Consequently, that's why some recent comics published in the last year or two are in higher demand than the comics which came out five to fifteen years ago. Collectors first want to complete the collections and read the titles that are currently popular.

Because of this initial high demand for recent back issues, prices creep upward and collectors quickly assume that they own a "valuable" and collectible comic book.

In reality, what they have is a high-demand **entertainment** item, and not a strictly collectible item at all.

Because of those few success stories in recent back issue titles, an aura starts to surround all comic books. Now every comic book is "collectible." Every new comic book is seen as a potential dollar-maker.

This is ridiculous. Do you buy new record albums because you believe that every record will be worth more later? Do you purchase science fiction paperbacks because you know that you can always resell them for more than you paid? I hope not.

What has happened is that collectors confuse the values and prices that are attached to truly collectible comic books with **all** comic books.

Here's a good example to help you understand the difference between a high-demand entertainment comic book and a truly collectible comic:

Recently one of the hottest titles has been **G.I. Joe** from Marvel. The first few issues, only three years old, sell for $5 to $12. If you've been paying this kind of money for this comic, here's some good advice: Sell them quick in the next two years.

This particular book has little or no inherent collector's value. It is not a significant mainstream Marvel title,it probably won't be published four or five years from now and it contains no memorable artists or characters.

In short, there is nothing about this comic that indicates it has a strong staying power to develop into a truly collectible comic book.

If you think I'm wrong, please look at the prices for another "hot" entertainment comic book—**Howard the Duck.** For the first few years, the early issues were selling for $8 to $15 each. Now they're

OWW-WWCH!
AND LET THAT BE A LESSON TO YOU!
13
YOU CAN RUN ALONG NOW. I'LL SEE TO IT THAT THESE CRIMINALS ARE TURNED OVER TO THE PROFICE.
THANKS. I'LL BE JUST IN TIME TO MAKE THE NEXT EDITION!
LATER...THE DAILY PLANET....
THIS IS ONE TIME YOU DIDN'T SCOOP ME!
IF I HAD SUPERMAN TO ASSIST ME, I'D MAKE A GOOD SHOWING, TOO!
THE END

being dumped for $2 to $3 because there was nothing in the book itself to make it a long-lasting collectible comic.

On the other hand, let's look at **X-Men 94** which is the classic example of the relatively recent comic book that has achieved the ranks of "collectible."

The book has outstanding artwork; it introduces several memorable and major characters; it is a long-running Marvel title that will probably always be published—in short, it has all the earmarks of a legitimate **collectible** comic book.

Remember: there are over 17,000 comic book titles available for you to collect. Of all those titles, fewer than five hundred attract serious collector interest. That means only a small percentage of all comic books—new and old—are **collectible**. The remaining comics are entertainment items, pure and simple.

As an entertainment item, a comic book has a relatively fixed value. This value is usually about the retail price of a new comic book itself, or what it is "worth" to read the comic.

For example, just to be able to read and own a comic book that you enjoyed ten years ago may be worth $2 to $4 to you—but I seriously doubt if it is worth $50 or $100.

During the early days of organized comic collecting in the mid- to late-1960s, all recent back issue comics were priced in line with the cost of a new comic. I remember ordering **Fantastic Four 1** for 75 **cents** in the mid-1960s.

Today you could spend $75 for a three-month old issue of **Teen-Age Mutant Ninja Turtles** (although I hope to God that you haven't and won't).

So what has happened?

People are spending money on recent back issues, speculating heavily on new comic releases and investing a lot of money in **entertainment** items that may or may not become truly collector's items for a number of years.

There's nothing wrong with this, and I can think of many worse ways to drop a wad of disposable income. But if you truly think you are investing, if you are planning on selling this carefully assembled collection of recent comics you bought over the last five years to pay for your college education or finance your first home purchase, then let me tell you the story of the Postage Stamp Widow:

In 1952, a woman collected $25,000 from her deceased husband's life insurance premium. She was wondering what to do with all of this money, and a good friend of hers told her that her uncle had made a lot of money over the years by investing in stamps.

The idea appealed to the widow, so every month she purchased mint sheets of postage stamp commemoratives from her local post office. She did this for twenty years and carefully stored her investments away in a safety deposit box.

In 1972, the widow was set to retire and she took her stamps to a dealer. He looked through her collection carefully, and then made her an offer: $22,500.

That's right. She could not even sell the stamps for their **face** value. The post office would not refund the money for the stamps as is their policy, and she was forced to sell them to a postage broker.

She did not realize that all those same stamps she had been buying were already well-stockpiled by dealers and collectors. They had minimal collector's value. She learned the hard way that not every stamp is a collectible item or a sure investment.

And so it is with comic books. They are not all "collectible" even though you may have saved them. They are not all great investments; in fact most are not. They are simply entertainment items—used magazines—and nothing precious or rare.

"The hardest thing about this job," said a comic book store manager, "is trying to explain why you can only pay a dime or so apiece for all of the recent comic books collectors bring to us. They believe that any comic book is going to be worth more than they paid for it, if they just wait a few months or a few years."

Like anything else, 95 percent of all new comics are simply grist for the mill. They are entertainment, pure and simple, and not an investment.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 50

A TALK WITH WALTER & LOUISE SIMONSON

BY MICHAEL J. O'CONNELL

Reader's of Marvel's **Power Pack** and **The Mighty Thor** have been fortunate to enjoy the efforts of two talented individuals who share the name Simonson. Walt Simonson plots, writes and draws the adventures of Thor, a once-dying book he helped revitalize. Louise, Walt's wife, is the creator and writer of the **Power Pack**, an innovative series that deals with superpowered children. With the recent success of these two books, Louise and Walt have gained popular acclaim. Though this attention is certainly deserved, one might not realize that they have been involved in comic books for years.

Walt began drawing when he was very young. "Sometime before I can remember," he admits. He read some comic books as a child, but drifted away from the medium as he grew older.

Likewise, Louise had an early exposure to comic books. "I didn't read superhero comics," Louise says. "I read **Little Lulu**. I read the Ducks, and Archies sometimes, and occasionally ECs when I could get ahold of them. I loved them." But Louise, too, lost interest as she grew older.

After some years, Walt had his second encounter with comic books. "In college, around 1965, I discovered Marvel Comics," he says. "They were already pretty well underway by that time. I got interested in reading them again.

"I was sucked right in," Walt explains. "For a few months, I was buying all the Marvel Comics that came out, which back then were only eight or ten titles a month. By the late Sixties, when I was in art school, I was still reading Marvel. I got interested in the problems of comics—drawing, telling stories, manipulating time, costumes, composition and typography. All the stuff that makes comic books work. I'd become less of a reader by then, and as I grew less interested in reading I became more interested in drawing."

While studying at the Rhode Island School of Design, Walt put together an early version of the Star Slammers. "Before I went to art school," Walt explains, "I had become a member of a local science fiction club, which was bidding on a WorldCon to be held in 1974 in Washington, D.C. We were planning the campaign to persuade people to vote for D.C. in '74 and somehow we came up with the idea of doing a giveaway comic strip. The Star Slammers were a direct result of my ideas for this freebie.

"The comic strip for the club took about two years to draw. I first used it as my junior project and then as a degree project in art school at RISD. It became my senior thesis."

With this project in his portfolio, Walt visited DC Comics in August, 1972, looking for employment. Though he still read Marvel Comics, DC was where he wanted to work. "At the time," he says, "they were doing comics I really liked a lot. This was when Kaluta was starting **The Shadow**, Wrightson was with the **Swamp Thing**, Chaykin had the **Ironwolf**

All Visuals © Marvel Comics Except Where Noted

Both Simonsons—Walt and Louise—are talented comic book craftspeople. Walt is both writing and drawing very exciting tales of Thor while Louise is author of the critically acclaimed Power Pack.

stuff and they had just gotten the Edgar Rice Burroughs material. They really had a lot of nifty things happening at DC."

Walt had little trouble getting hired. "Carmine Infantino saw the portfolio and he liked it a lot. He called in three of his editors and forced them to give me work!" Laughing, Walt adds, "Which was okay with me."

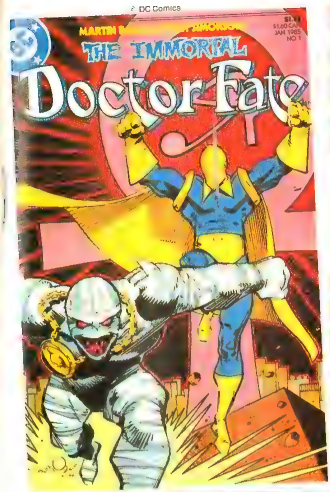
Though he was getting work, Walt had to make it known that he was not just a science fiction artist. "I knew artists who were typed as science fiction artists and didn't have a lot of success getting work outside that genre, and there wasn't much of that genre around. My portfolio was science fiction material so those were the first jobs I got. I worked at getting other kinds of stuff. I did a three-page Alamo job, a Western, for Archie Goodwin when he was editing the war books at DC. On the basis of that, Archie decided that I could draw something besides science fiction and offered me the Manhunter series.

Walt has fond memories of this award-winning strip. "For whatever reason, Archie and I were able to produce material that I feel is some of the best I have ever put together. The marriage of words and pictures worked really well, and that doesn't always happen. In fact, it rarely works as well as it did there."

Appearing in just seven issues of **Detective Comics**, the Manhunter series had a tremendous impact on Walt's career. "It made me, professionally," he admits. "I didn't have to worry about being typed as just a science fiction artist. From Manhunter on, I had no

"(Manhunter) made me professionally, I didn't have to worry about being typed as just a science fiction artist."
—Walter

Visuals © DC Comics



"The inspirations for Power Pack are the books that I read as a child. I wanted to do the kind of comic I would have liked to have read. So I did a comic about kids with superpowers, because that's what I liked reading when I was a child."

—Louise

trouble getting work. I now have no trouble getting work in different genres. It was a professional watershed for me."

About this time, Walt met Louise Jones. "She was working for a publishing company not related to comic books at all. She was a mutual friend of Archie and his wife, Ann Murphy. I met her at their home. Archie and Ann used to sort of take care of and feed me. When you're a young, starving freelancer, that's very nice. So I met Weezie through them, and knew her for about a year before we actually began going out with each other." They married in 1980.

Louise had come to New York after studying English and art at Georgia State College (now Georgia State University). Her first job in comic books was in the production department at Warren Publishing. "I knew Michelle Brand, who is now Michelle Wrightson, when she worked at Warren," Louise explains. "She told me that they had an opening there that paid more than the job I had. I was working in advertising and promotion at the time. Warren hired me and, a couple of years after that, they made me the editor."

Louise worked at Warren until 1980, when she left to join the marvel staff. She edited **Star Wars** and the **New Mutants**, as well as fifty-odd issues of **The X-Men**.

"It was a fun book," Louise says about **The X-Men**. "Chris Claremont is so full of ideas. The only problem with editing it was helping him choose which idea to do this month. It was a lovely book to work on and the personnel, the people who worked on it, were great."

Though she enjoyed working on some of Marvel's most popular books, Louise wanted to do more. "I could edit with my eyes shut," she reveals. "It was just too easy. I'd been doing it for ten years." Eventually, she approached Jim Shooter, Marvel's editor-in-chief, with the idea of creating a comic book about superpowered children. Hence the Power Pack.

"The inspiration for the Power Pack are the books that I read as a child. I'm not talking comics particularly, but Edward

"THROW ME IS, KATIE--SEE? JUST LIKE IN MY DREAMS!
SO...SO YOU'RE RIGHT, YOU BABY! DON'T WET YOUR DIAPERS!
WHO--WHO ARE YOU?
GREETINGS, COUSIN! MY NAME IS MOXY AND I HAVE COME TO EARTH TO SAVE YOU!
YOU'RE GOING TO SAVE ME?
I WAS GOING TO TRY COUGH LOADS BUT NOW AS YOU SEE I CAN HARDLY SAVE MYSELF!
YOU CALLED US, COUSINS?
I WAS COMING TO AMUSING MINUTES AND WHO GAVE YOU HIS POWERS! WOW, HE IS THE BIGGEST BRAT WE'VE MET!
WOW! THAT'S GREAT! WE'D BETTER GET YOU AROUND THE YOU PRONTO!
SHUT UP, FRANKLIN! JUST A MOMENT AND WON'T DO US ANY MORE GOOD!
GOOD GAWD! A SWARM! HUNDREDS! WE COME FROM?
WHO CARES? THERE'S ONLY ONE! IT OUGHTA TAKE ABOUT FIVE SECONDS TO FINISH HIM!
YOU DIDN'T REMEMBER TO BRING A MAGIC SWORD?

Power Pack is a group of real kids with true personalities, not typical comic book stereotypes.

Eager's magic books, Robert Heinlein's juvenile science fiction, Marguerite Henry's horse books, and Jim Kjelgaard's dog books. When I decided to do **Power Pack**, I wanted to do the kind of comic I would have liked to have read. So I did a comic about kids with superpowers, because that's what I liked reading when I was a child."

The Power Pack consists of four brothers and sisters who have been given superpowers by a dying alien named Whitey. Initially, they use their new gifts to fend off an attack on Earth by the Snarks, the grotesque enemies of Whitey's people, the Kymellians. Recent stories have dealt with the children's attempts to keep their identities secret while battling evil in New York City.

The most difficult thing about coming up with the Power Pack was creating original powers. "It took me a long time to screw up and not think of good ones," Louise says, "and it took me one second to think of good ones once I figured out what I wanted to do, which was E = MC2 plus gravity. I had four children and I needed four powers."

From oldest to youngest, Alex, known as Gee, has the ability to change his own or any other object's specific gravity; Julie, called Lightspeed, can fly incredibly fast; Jack, nicknamed Mass Master, is able to change his own mass, becoming everything from cloudlike to super-dense; and Katie, called Energizer, can absorb energy by disintegrating objects and then release that energy in fiery blasts.

"I love the idea of the littlest one being so destructive," Louise admits. "Because I used to know a little boy who was named Alex, who could touch an alarm clock and it would fall apart. Katie is really based on Alex."

Though powerful, the children did not receive the same abilities as Whitey, just variations. "As they get older I think they will acquire more abilities. I don't think it will be like the mutants particularly, with the onset of puberty. I think it will be more of a learned thing. Jack has already learned that he can go dense. In number thirteen, Julie discovers that she can go much faster than she thought she could."

What really makes the Power Pack entertaining is not the children's extraordinary powers but the convincing portrayal of their personalities. "they're all part of me, different aspects of my own personality," Louise says. "Yes, when one of them is being beastly, it's me being beastly. When one of them is being smart, it's me being smart. I think that's true of any character that anyone writes. You write from your own experience or your own perceptions."

Accordng to Louise, she has no trouble writing about children without writing down to children. "I don't think children are dumb. They're as smart as we are, they just don't know as much because they haven't been around long enough. Besides, when I was a child I read at a very high level. I was reading at a college level when I was ten, which surprised everyone when I was tested on one of those college things. Nobody could believe it. I didn't look smart."

Early on, Louise incorporated a number of happy endings which added an aura of childlike innocence to the series. "I was trying to keep it light in the beginning, although I think you'll find that the book will get temporarily darker. But then it will lighten up again. If, as a reader, you can always count on there

Power Pack and Thor are very different books, with different sensibilities.

being a happy ending, then why bother?"

To counterbalance the light tone of the early issues, Louise featured appearances by Spiderman and Cloak and Dagger, all of whom experienced tragedies in their youth which forced them to grow up quickly. At the end of the Cloak and Dagger story, the children celebrate victory in the warmth of their family circle while the guest stars watch from the darkness outside. "It was happy for the kids, but sad for Cloak and Dagger," Louise says.

Recently, the Power Pack appeared in a comic book produced by the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse. "I wrote the story within their guidelines," Louise reveals. "They do have specific guidelines which I was interested in, and they also know how to tell children certain things. I was pointed by them in certain directions, but the plot and the story and the characters were mine. They made some changes in the dialogue to match up to what their guidelines were, and I agreed with all of them. Some of them actually made the story stronger. They went further than I really thought they wanted us to go." In the story, the Power Pack assists an abused friend in finding the proper aid.

Louise plans to deal with important issues in the series, but not right away. "What we've got coming up is the Super-Snark coming to Earth. Then we have the Snark wars, in which the kids will actually go off into space again and deal with stuff there. After they come back to Earth from that is when we'll get into some of those themes."

Aside from Power Pack, Louise writes the adventures of Red Sonja. "**Red Sonja** is a story of sex, death and betrayal. Power Pack, of course, has none of these things," Louise laughs. "I find **Sonja** a lot of fun as well as very relaxing and enjoyable to write, because I can do things with it that would not be appropriate in **Power Pack**."

Louise also provides Walt with creative feedback on **Thor**. "I hear about it in the plot stage and I look at the thumbnails. I read the plot and the script, and then I proofread the final thing before it goes out. I read **Thor** about eight times and I still enjoy it, which must mean it's very good."

After the Manhunter, Walt worked on a number of different projects, including the **Metal Men** and a Doctor Fate story for Dc, the **Alien** graphic novel for **Heavy Metal** and even a year's worth of **Thor** for Marvel in 1977. His involvement with the book then wasn't the same as it is now.

"I wasn't writing, and that makes some difference because it's fun to write the stuff," Walt says. "But from my point of view it differed mainly because I was doing Thor for the first time and having a really good time doing it. I was doing my Kirbyoid stuff. I really got to do Jack Kirby and that was a lot of fun. Now I'm still borrowing from Kirby, but not in the same way."

When Walt approached his current stint on the series, he had two simple goals. "To have a good time and to sell a few comic books, both of which seemed to have panned out. I liked Thor a lot when I was reading the comic, I thought it would be fun to do him and it has been."

Walt revitalized Thor's character by introducing changes in the series. "I wanted to get rid of Don Blake," Walt says, "and I wanted to do something that had never been done before in the comic. The best possibility seemed to be to have somebody else pick up Thor's hammer." That someone turned out to be Beta Ray Bill.

Though Bill proved to be a popular new character, Walt has nothing special

Thor contains strong emotions and violent scenes.

planned for him. "I wouldn't mind doing a miniseries if I come up with a good story for him. I'm doing a Balder miniseries right now, because I think Balder's got good story possibilities. Bill's a good supporting character, but I'm not really sure that he's worth knowing more about than we know about him now."

The elimination of Dr. Blake and the introduction of Beta Ray Bill pale in comparison to the changes brought about by the Surtur Saga. "The original plot for that was cooked up in 1967," Walt reveals. "I actually drew about thirty pages of the climax in 1969 and 1970, and this is my chance to do that story. The details are all different. I did not invent Beta Ray Bill back then. I didn't have Malekith or any of that stuff. Those are all the things I put together when I was doing the strip this time around.

"The one thing I really stayed with was the climax—except for getting rid of Odin. I didn't originally plan that, but as the story went on it seemed like the right move. It was a big story and it needed a big finish, a 'wow' finish."

"He thought he was going to get killed and never come back. That's why he sent Frigga off and had the farewell in the dawn. Maybe he didn't know beforehand, it's hard to say. We can't ask him now."

By not transfering Odin's powers to Thor or Loki, Walt left the permanency of the god king's death in question. "If that's the way it works, I think it's likely. On the other hand, I don't think Hela would have shown up if she hadn't sensed something. I'm playing it negligent in the comic because I think the reader's imaginations will provide much more interesting solutions to this problem than mine."

As far as Thor's future goes, Walt will be continuing the plotlines he's already laid down. He also plans to explore the private life of Sigurd Jarlson, Thor's new alter ego. "But not too private, because it's a code comic," Walt cautions.

"I like telling the stories in batches because it's kind of like the Icelandic Sagas. You get these big, long epics, things interweave, different characters come and go then show up again. I'm using this as a model for **Thor**. The first series of stories was really the Surtur Saga. The next batch will concern who rules in Asgard. And then after that I'd like to do a Giant/Asgard war. Without Odin, the giants will probably launch a major attack on Asgard. The opening salvos of the war will be in the Balder miniseries, which will actually run concurrently with some of the 'Who Will Rule Asgard' questions."

Despite their busy schedules, Walt and Louise express an interest in collaborating on some future project. "I'd like to do one of her stories some time," Walt admits.

"It would be fun," Louise agrees," but I don't see any reason why he should work with another writer. He's so good himself. It would be sort of a waste if you ask me."

Both Simonsons find that working in the same field is a positive force in their lives. "We speak the same language," Walt says. "Which is very useful. It has worked out really well."

Despite the demands made on them by their various projects, Louise and Walt attack their work with an intense vitality and joy. This is reflected in their stories. It is the reader who is the ultimate beneficiary of this marriage of imagination and energy. CF

LETTERS

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Dear Editor,

I think Comics Feature is Great! Here are some ideas for you to consider.

1. Do not change Comics Feature in any way.
2. Go monthly.
3. Expand your coverage to the paperback companies such as Gold Eagle, Pinnacle, etc.
4. A story about Gold Eagle and its characters: Mark Bolan, Able Team, Phoenix Force, S.O.B.S., Dagger Track, The Takers.
5. A story about the effect on the comics scene if Gold Eagle published its characters in comics.

Thank you,
Charles Martin
Box 493
Robersonville, N.C.
27871

—We will immediately consider your idea and take steps not to change Comics Feature **in any way. Huh? I am sure that is not what you meant and we have indeed gone monthly as you can see. I am very pleased that you love our book. For material on media action heroes, may we recommend the excellent** HEROES magazine **which I also edit.**

Dear Editor,

Yes, I can write letters. Sorry I haven't done so earlier, but I'm not a long-time reader of CF and wanted to get a good idea of all you offer. But your recent editorial truly prompted me to write.

I was amazed that the September issue of **Comics Feature** sold poorly. I never once thought your audience would be so limited as to ignore that issue. I bought it and the interview was great, frank and revealing indeed. Rather funny though, considering Buscema's doing the Avengers again and the majority of your readers passed him by last year. It's also rather disillusioning, at times. But as I recently told Rich Norwood of **Manuscript Press** in a letter, I don't believe those fans who are strictly "Superhero Fanatics" and/or "Marvel Maniacs" truly represent the majority of fandom. Perhaps these people descended on your magazine for the most part as **The Comics Buyer's Guide** and **Amazing Heroes** seem to have a well-mixed readership.

My advice to you is do what you **know** is right, not what a bunch of narrow-minded, limited taste people think is right and deserves attention. I'm very much into independent comics—and I also read Marvel and DC titles—and I learned that having a good product and a small, though loyal, audience is very important. If giving certain products and creators the attention so richly deserved means that an issue every now and then won't sell as well...well, so be it. Try not to be disheartened or pushed around. Heck, it's not as though no one bought that one issue. "Talent Deserves Recognition", darn right, and don't you ever forget it.

Okay, other comments and suggestions. Despite the fact I like Marvel, it seems that you're becoming their second house organ almost. DC has a lot of hot stuff going too, and they deserve coverage, but since I've started reading **CF** only one issue featured DC as the main piece. Though sales might drop off, how about a series of features—even secondary ones, which may be necessary to keep up the sales—on the independent comics and what's new with them. Also, coverage of tv and movies is weak, though "Animated Antics" is a very good feature. There is a lot to be covered now. For example, Chris Reeve has signed on to do **Superman IV**, NBC's **Misfits of Science** this fall is supposed to be about a superhero team, **DNAgents** may become a CBS series and there's always the unknown fates of the X-Men and Batman movies. Next year, Cannon Films is coming out with a **Captain America** and a **Spider-Man** film. A tv/movie feature is in order, don't you think?

Beyond this, I like all the other features and columns in **CF**. I can find no fault. Keep up the great work!

Sincerely,
Dan Schofield
652 Highland Ave
Johnstown, Pa.
15902

—I am very pleased that someone out there can indeed write. As you see from this letters page, we really do have a paucity of letters. Now that we are on a monthly schedule, we will need even more than before if we are to continue this much-needed feature. Perhaps our adding of Mr. Marvel, Stan Lee, himself may not meet with your approval. But we do feel that he is addition well worth the space even if it does link us somewhat with Marvel in the minds of some readers. We do indeed intend to carry loads of features on DC-related matters. Next issue we will have a couple of surprises in store, but we do not intend to shift too much of the emphasis from the best-selling comic book company as that does seem to be what most readers want.

Dear Editor,

I have just read my first issue of **Comics Feature** and I have found the information presented enjoyable and helpful.

I usually do not write to publications in the comics field, but your editorial "Talent Deserves Recognition" was well written and hit the nail on the head. I have been a comic collector for many years but consider myself a pure Hyborian warrior. I collect all of Robert E. Howard's work including comics such as **King Kull** and **Conan**. I believe John Buscema is a great artist who many enjoy and who never gets the full recognition he deserves. I have ordered six copies of the September issue for my collection.

The format in **CF** is good, but please remember there are many of us sword and sorcery fans and collectors and we would appreciate equal time and space for the great writers and artists in the field.

Thank you,
Jim Wheeler
42 Cooper Street
Agawam, Ma.
01001

—This certainly seems to be the month to butter up the old editor. Not only does everyone seem to like the magazine but even my editorials. They certainly were not written with the idea of flattering our readers, so I am somewhat surprised at the favorable reaction. Pleased, but surprised.

NEWS

Continued From Page 5

DC COMICS SALUTES NEW TALENT

As the final issue of **Talent Showcase** rolls off the press, DC Comics deems the 19-issue run of the title a success.

"We began **New Talent Showcase** in 1983 to introduce newcomers to the field," notes Vice President-Executive Editor Dick Giordano. "Talent Coordinator Sal Amendola worked closely with up and coming artists and writers, training and nurturing their talent. So did editors Marv Wolfman, Ernie Colon, Roger Slifer and Karen Berger during that first year or so. The artists benefited with hands on experience with comic book publishing; **New Talent Showcase** gave them a forum for expressing their capabilities. We benefited by 'discovering' new talent."

Many talented newcomers who were first published in the pages of **New Talent Showcase** went on to regular work in the field. Inker Karl Kesel has worked on **The Legion of Super-Heroes**. Writer Mindy Newell writes **Wonder Woman** and has written issues of **Superman** and dialogued **The Legion of Super-Heroes**. Artist Stan Woch contributed to **World's Finest** as has inker Rick Magyar and artist Mike Chen, while penciller Cara Sherman-Tereno went on to illustrate **Arion**. Shawn McManus has pencilled **Swamp Thing** and **Green Arrow** and is currently pencilling and inking **Omega Men**. Dennis Yee has pencilled **Superman**. Others work for publishers other than DC.

"All in all, I'd say that **New Talent Showcase** and its later incarnation **Talent Showcase** were well worth our time and effort. The book has served its purpose. Issue 19 will be the final installment," states Dick Giordano.

SHORT TAKES

Kurt Schaffenberger won the National Cartoonists Society Award as Best Comic Book Artist, 1984, for his work on **Superman**. The award was presented at the 39th annual Reuben Awards Dinner at the Plaza Hotel on April 29, 1985.

The Crisis on Infinite Earths tie-ins for December cover-dated books include **All-Star Squadron 52, Fury of Firestorm 42, Green Lantern 195, Infinity, Inc. 21,** and **Justice League of America 245**. The January cover-dated tie-ins are **Superman 415, All-Star Squadron 53, Infinity, Inc 22,** and **The Legion of Super-Heroes 18.**

Beginning with the March cover-dated issue, **G.I. Combat** will join the line of 32-page, 75¢ comic book titles.

Beginning with the December cover-dated issues, both **Amethyst** and **Sgt. Rock** will become bimonthly titles.

Forthcoming **DC Comics Presents** team-ups include Superman and the Omega Men by Bob Rozakis, Todd Klein and Alex Saviuk; and Superman and the Creeper by Steve Englehart, Keith Giffen and Karl Kesel (issue 88).

Luke McDonnell, penciller on Marvel Comics'**Ironman**, is the new penciller on **Justice League of America**, beginning with issue 245.

Mike Machlan becomes the new inker on **Fury of Firestorm** with issue 43. CF

EDITORIAL

Continued From Page 2

with great trepidition and, as I write this, anxiously anticipate his response. Being the professional that he is, I am sure that he will react in a proper manner. But golly, I am really editing and publishing a magazine containing the words of perhaps the greatest comic book writer ever to live!

As you probably gathered somewhere between the lines above, Stan Lee will begin a regular column with this issue. We also add another important voice, Mike Benton, the author of Harmony Books' **Comic Book Collecting for Fun and Profit**, is a very knowledgeable man when it comes to investing in and properly saving comic books. He will explain to you in his column why I, someone who has previously not really believed in a column about the monetary end of the hobby, felt that his words would be a welcome addition to this magazine.

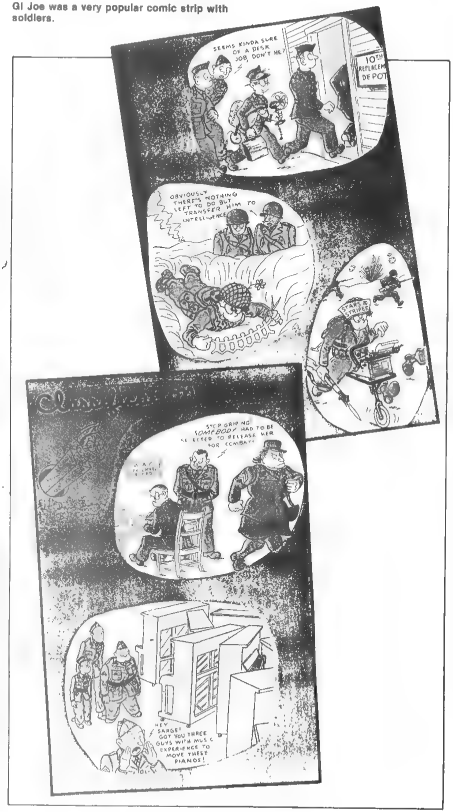
There is one other major change that I am sure you have noticed when you bought this issue. Bucking the inflationary trend prevalent in the industry, we have lowered the price by one dollar and twenty cents. We sincerely hope that this brings the magazine within the price range of everyone who can benefit by its information. We have been lucky enough to be very, very successful so far. We are selling far better than anyone believed possible when we began this venture. Both as a thank-you and because we feel that the potential is still greater, we are making the change on our fifth anniversary. With the same issue we begin monthly publication. Hot news and the latest listing of upcoming comic books will be a hallmark of the now more-frequent title. Hopefully, this will make the magazine still more valuable and sought after.

Let's be truthful. When we changed the price we also had to reduce the number of color pages. We don't know how you feel about that but we felt that the trade-off was worth it. The major problem that assaults us every time that we put the book together is the color section. Comic book art does not exist in color. That may sound like an odd statement, but most comic books are colored through a process known as hand separations. That means there are plastic (either rubylith or amberlith) overlays for each of the colors and the base art is always black and white! If we want to run art in color, it either has to be taken from something already in print or we have to hand separate it ourselves and hope that we choose the same colors that the separator will. That is a dilemma. Either we give you something that you already have or we risk getting it wrong. If what you wanted was the information, the opinions and the words of the creator in the first place, and the color pages are something of a waste (a pretty waste, but a waste nonetheless), then why make you pay more for them and drive ourselves up a wall at the same time?

Therefore the change—both in price and number of color pages. Let us know if you agree. Please, do let us know as we are very much guessing in the dark on this. By the way, the number of letters has begun to increase. Still not many, so I am not yet convinced that most of you can write. But we can at least begin our letters section.

Continued From Page 13

GI Joe was a very popular comic strip with soldiers.


SEEMS KINDA SLOW OF A DEAL JOB, DON'T HE?
10TH REPLACEMENT DEPOT
OBVIOUSLY THERE'S NOTHING LEFT TO DO BUT TRANSFER HIM TO UNTELLMENT
STOP GRIPING! SOMEBODY HAD TO BE SENT TO RELIEVE HER HOE SCHEDULE
SARGE! GOT YOU A SPECIAL DUTY ASSIGNMENT TO SUPERVISE THE MOVE THERE PIANO!

end) contrasted quotes from the military's "Articles of War" with their actual practice or with absurdly literal readings. For example, illustrating Article of War No. 61 ("Any person subject to military law who...absents himself from his command...") is a frame in which a scuffed-up, battle-scarred Joe drags behind him a prisoner, none other than Der Fuehrer himself, while an irritated Sergeant bawls out the G.I.: "I don't give a damn **where** you've been or **who** your friend is! You're gonna get it for missing roll call the last 3 days!"

If anything, the G.I. JOE pages, with their interrelated gags, outshine the PRIVATE BREGER panels. Working for a strictly Armed Forces audience, Breger was able to say "damn" and "hell" when he pleased, indulge in off-the-wall surrealism, and risk an occasional sexual innuendo. Doing a series of gags on a single theme allowed him to build laugh upon laugh; even his drawing seems looser, as he runs free.

Like many servicemen, G.I. JOE, PRIVATE BREGER and their creator returned to a postwar world that didn't live up to the advance reports. Never again would they be so free and so young as when the military had hold of them.

"I would like to advance a modest claim to fame," Breger once said, "as the creator, as far as I know, of G.I. JOE, born in **Yank**, June 17, 1942."

Somehow it seems fitting, if ironic, that a free spirit like Breger should be forever tied to the military, and the irony lessens when you realize that it's the common man he's identified with, the everyday soldier, the ordinary joe that Breger so typified in his work and in the terms that he made famous—and that has made so many others rich.

Is it presumptuous of me to assume that the bosses at Hasbro have jutting jaws and squiggly mustaches? **CF**

Games

BY STEVE PERRIN

I'm going to have to postpone my essay on what make a good superhero role playing game. It seems I have some examples to give, and reality is worth a thousand theories.

DC HEROES GAME IS A WINNER

A while back I reviewed a manuscript copy of the **DC HEROES** game for this column. At that time, I was not impressed, and said so.

In the more than six months since I received that copy, the good folks at Mayfair Games performed a small miracle. The final result is excellent, playable, a game with an incredible wealth of material. I am now impressed.

Just as DC comics are slightly more expensive than Marvels, but done on higher quality paper with better color reproduction, the **DC HEROES** game has higher quality materials than TSR's Marvel game throughout. For $17.00, about $4.00 more than the Marvel game, the buyer receives a 16-page quick introduction to the main rules, a 32 page scenario book with three scenarioes and a 40-page Player's Manual which repeats the material in the introduction with greater detail and more options of action (including creating the player's own DC hero). Also included are a separate 40-page Powers and Skills book which explains all the powers and skills necessary to DC heroes, a 96-page Gamemaster's Manual with excellent gamemaster's instruction and a detailed layout of Titans Tower. Plus briefer descriptions of the Vegan system, Metropolis, Gotham City, Star City, and Central City, the two necessary die, over 30 character cards describing the Teen Titans, the old JLA and most of their major foes and cut-out figures of the heroes and villains, civilians and bystanders. Throw in plastic supports for the cut-outs and—finally—a gorgeous Gamemaster's Screen with all the necessary tables and charts for the GM's use and a striking depiction of Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman on the other side for the players to look at and you have a very complete game..

My main objection to the preliminary manuscript was that the game seemed too complex for easy understanding. **DC HEROES** is still complex, but the writing has been improved and expanded for easier comprehension. Unlike **MARVEL SUPERHEROES, DC HEROES** will force players to think. But the explanations are available, and easily accessible.

Complexity is a plus factor for longevity of play. This is a game with meat on it. Players will find new nuances months after first opening the box, rather than exausting all possibilities in a few games.

Mayfair plans to issue new modules every month. I, for one, look forward to seeing what they do with them. Unlike TSR's Marvel modules, which just present the usual Marvel characters, Mayfair allows players to create their own characters and bring them into contact with established DC heroes. Can your players' organization of new superheroes, the Pittsburgh Sentinels, help Firestorm defeat the machinations of the 2000 Committee? Play the module and see.

DC Heroes is a must-buy for long-time gamers who want to sample the richness of the DC universe. And for

new players who want a challenging game while embarking on the exciting path of the role-playing gamer.

THE JUSTICE MACHINE SOURCEBOOK

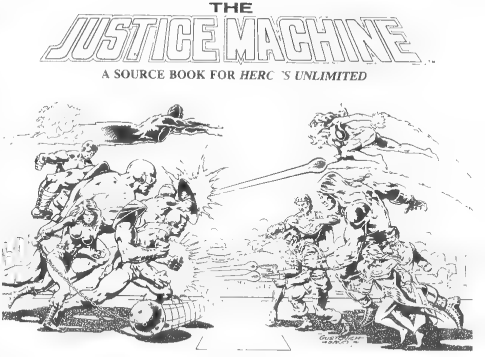
A few years ago, Mike Gustovich started his own comics company—Noble Comics. This wobbly young company managed to print 5 issues of **The Justice Machine** before succumbing to financial woes. Mike now pencils and inks various comics for Marvel and First.

During its short history, **Justice Machine** was noteworthy for its interesting mix of superheroes and Orwellian, literally, background. Avid readers, such as yours truly, were left with many questions and no answers when the book came to its untimely demise.

Palladium Books has come to the rescue of such readers—and anyone else looking for a fascinating campaign background for a superhero compaign. The Justice Machine supplement for **Heroes Unlimited** provides 142 pages of background information, new heroes and villains, maps, political system descriptions and everything else the players or gamemaster needs to run **Heroes Unlimited** adventures of the Justice Machine and their friends and allies.

The real attraction of this book to the non-HU player is the information about the secretly oppressive extradimensional world of Georwell and the version of "normal" Earth the Justice Machine fled to. The character descriptions, though done in HU format, are detailed enough for easy translation to other systems including **Champions, Superworld, Villains and Vigilantes** and even **DC Heroes**. The supplement even gives combat rules and the meanings to game-specific terms as S.D.C., I.e. Structural Damage Capacity, so someone without the original rules can make easy translations.

The $14.95 pricetag on this softcover, perfect-bound, book puts it out of a lot of budgets. There are illoes of various Justice Machine stalwarts by Brent Anderson, Terry Austin, John Byrne, Paul Gulacy, Bob Layton, Bill Sienkiewicz and many others throughout the book.



YET ANOTHER CHAMPIONS &A NEW SCREEN

Champions was the despair of distributors for several months because it sold out and Hero Games had no more to ship. This problem is solved with the issuing of **Champions** in a 144 page perfect-bound book.

By doing this, Hero Games flies in the face of "conventional wisdom", which says that boxes sell better than books. Hero is banking that with their book three dollars cheaper than their boxed version, comic buyers and veteran gamers who have no particular need for the box or the dice will buy it in droves.

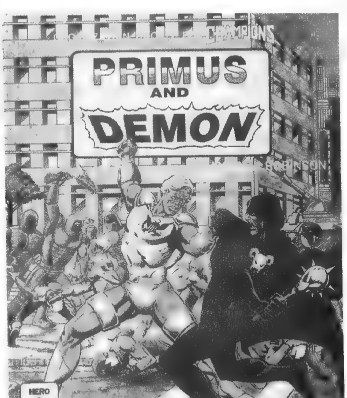
Aside from the lack of dice and streetmap, the book version has no difference from the previous boxed version.

Hero Games has finally issued a Gamemaster's Screen compatible with the new rules. To sweeten the package, they have rehabilitated their first game scenario, "The Island of Dr. Destroyer" and included it. "DR. D" is excellent. The goodguys have to land on the island without being blown out of the air by SAM missiles and find out where the good doctor has hidden the Mind Control satellite and stop it from launching. Along the way, they have to deal with two hundred semi-tough mercenaries and 8 or so supervillains, plus the extremely powerful Dr. D himself. This fine starter scenario gets players in the proper Champions spirit and is a fit companion for the GM screen.

The screen has one flaw that I find bothersome. The new editor of **Champions** revised the Growth and Shrinking power to the extent that those who use them must refer to special tables. However, these tables are not on the screen. Otherwise, all needed tables are artfully displayed for easy reference, though sometimes the gamemaster has to ask the player what a table says...

SUPER SOLDIERS AND DEMONIC GANGSTERS

Recently Hero Games unveiled their second Organization Book, **PRIMUS and DEMON**. This book, written entirely by Andrew Robinson, is a description of the federal, SHIELD-like, organization known as PRIMUS—complete with special agents, armor-suited agents, a glorious leader (the Super Soldier known as the Golden Avenger), superpowered enforcers (the Silver Avengers) and the organization of criminal



necromancers known as DEMON. This $8.00 32-page book includes character writeups on the various Avengers PRIMUS AGENTS, Morbanes (DEMON's priest-godfathers), Demonwarriors and Mechagents, plus one super-powered leader for the local Demon base. Also included is a typical PRIMUS base and a typical DEMON lair with a several part scenario which includes both establishments.

There's a lot for the **Champions** gamemaster in this book, but editing is badly needed. **Champions** depends on creating characters with point values—power points are balanced against disadvantage points. The two totals must equal, but none of the characters described in this book have balanced points. Various important powers, such as Armor and Flight for the armored flying agents, are left off the descriptions. The scenario calls for "bound demons" for use by DEMON, but no descriptions at all are given for them.

This is still a must-have book for **Champions** players. But be ready to rework provided characters before running the scenario or using them in any other game.

PROJECT WIDEAWAKE

TSR continues to issue **Marvel Super Heroes** modules of greater or lesser utility. One of the best is **Project Wideawake**, a book which purports to be a description of every mutant in the Marvel Universe. For the most part, they deliver what they promise.

This module was designed by Jeff Grubb, which is a sure bet that all the statistics will be correct. The book includes maps of the X-Mansion (taken from the Marvel Universe Series), a brief mutant history and writeups on several non-mutants who are regular members of Marvel mutant mythology, such as Juggernaut, Warlock, the Silver Samurai and Lilandra.

There is no scenario; just game statistics and background. **Project Wideawake** is still invaluable for the **Marvel Super Heroes** gamemaster who doesn't want to use published scenarios (which his players could buy and read) but needs official statistics on the X-Men and their friends and enemies. Like the earlier **Avengers Assemble**, this book is a must for players and interesting reading for anyone who wants to follow the soap operatic lives of Marvel's mutants.

NO-GOOD NOSFERATU

Fantasy Games Unlimited has released **Terror by Night, a Villains and Vigilantes** module featuring an evil, extremely powerful vampire as the villain. Like all V&V pieces, this scenario is easily adapted to other game systems. **Terror By Night** presents a very intersting puzzle to players. It is possible, though unlikely, that the superheroes involved in this case might never strike a blow.

The vampire and his history are very well delineated, with good characterization and motivation and lots of red herrings in the forms of zombie masters, bat trainers, etc. to keep the gamers guessing. In all, a very pleasing scenario to befuddle players with.

To aid in translating this scenario to **Superworld, Terror By Night** also contains the article I did months ago on how to convert from V&V to **Superworld**. Another blow for cooperation in the gaming industry. **CF**

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Champions Hero Games, 92A 21st Ave. San Mateo, CA 94402
DC Heroes Mayfair Games, Inc. P.O. Box 5987, Chicago IL 60680
Heroes Unlimited Palladium Books, 5669 Casper Ave., Detroit, MI 48210
Marvel Super Heroes TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva, WI 53147.
Superworld Chaosium, Inc., P.O. Box 6302, Albany, CA 94706
Villains and Vigilantes Fantasy Games Unlimited, P.O. Box 182, Roslyn, NY.11578

Continued From Page 15

in a certain context which sparks the imagination. A few months before the Hulk came on the scene, DC introduced a minor character as a backup feature in **House of Secrets**. Called Eclipso, he never caught on in any big way, perhaps because he was too unusual. He was a Jekyll/Hyde character, a man who was transformed into the supervillain Eclipso and became an entirely different personality.

Lee took images and ideas and created something very different. Whereas the Thing was a tragic figure in the Fantastic Four, the Hulk was even more tragic. When he becomes his alter ego, he loses all traces of humanity and memory. Initially Banner changed into a grey Hulk at night when the sun set. He became green with the second issue and all reprints of the origin, except for the one in **Marvel Tales** 1, use the familiar green color.

In the 24 pages of the first issue, not only is the Hulk introduced, but there is a story in which the Hulk is kidnapped and taken to Russia where he meets the Gargoyle, a Soviet scientist. The Gargoyle realizes that Banner and the Hulk are one and asks why Banner would want to be the Hulk. The Gargoyle knows the misery of being an outcast. Banner cures the Gargoyle and the grateful scientist blows up his complex, comitting suicide in the process, to express his contempt for mother Russia.

In issue three, the Hulk is tricked into a space capsule by Rick Jones. Jones believes that the Air Force is using the Hulk to test the rocket because no human could survive. Actually it's a plot to banish the Hulk into space. After the rocket is launched, Rick learns the truth. He tampers with the controls, receiving a shock but causing the rocket to return to Earth. While in space, the Hulk changes back to Banner when bathed in sunlight. He is hit with gamma rays once more, this time as a part of cosmic rays. The Hulk is reborn and survives the capsule's crash landing. For a time, Rick has a special mental link to the Hulk that allows him to control the beast. Finally he takes him to Banner's lab and uses a machine to change him back to Banner. Then, for a time Banner is able to change himself into the Hulk but retain his own intellect and memories.

Issue three introduced the concept of the Hulk flying by taking tremendous leaps, not unlike Superman originally did in the early Forties.

The comic quickly advanced the Hulk into a brutish persona, although still relatively coherent and in partial control. Issue six, drawn entirely by Steve Ditko (who inked issue two, as well), introduced the Teen Brigade, a group organized by Rick Jones to contact the Hulk when trouble loomed such as only he could face.

Before the first run expired, the Hulk guest-starred in **Fantastic Four** 12 as a way to hook Marvelites on his own comic. It didn't take and the title was cancelled after the sixth issue appeared.

VILLAIN OR HERO?

Some six months later, the Hulk returned as one of the Avengers in the first issue of their title. He wasn't around for long, though, as he quit at the end of issue two, not unlike the Human Torch quitting at the end of **Fantastic Four** 3.

In **The Avengers** 3, Rick Jones and the Teen Brigade try to find the Hulk but Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner, tracks him down first. Namor convinces the jade goliath that they should join forces and they proceed to engage the Avengers in a knock-down, drag-out fight on an island. Drawn by Jack Kirby, this was the hey-day of comic book fight scenes. It was so good that in **Thor** 112, an untold sequence from that battle is related, again by Kirby.

The Hulk continued to be a hunted outcast, meeting the Fantastic Four in a two-party battle in **FF** 25&26 in which the Avengers also make an appearance.

In **Tales to Astonish** 59 (Sept. '64), the Hulk meets and battles Giant Man in a story which picks up from the Hulk's guest appearance in **Spider-Man** 14. In Marvel comics, at that time, it was a common practice for one character to battle another and then begin their own strip in the following issue. Steve Ditko pencilled the Hulk from his first episode in **Tales to Astonish** 60.

Several pages of story from the very first issue of The Hulk. Lee and Kirby were just beginning to learn how the character worked. John Byrne intends to return to this version of the character.

In these early stories, the Hulk meets a supergenius known as the Leader, another green-skinned atomic transformation. The stories were pretty standard with Bruce Banner trying to cover up for his unexplained disappearances while his love interest, Betsy Ross, tries to understand it all. Her father, Thunderbolt Ross, hates Banner and suspects him of treason.

But then the series took an interesting turn. In **Tales to Astonish 77**, Rick Jones believes that the Hulk is dead and reveals that Banner and the Hulk are the same, launching the series in much more interesting directions. This was the sort of thing that Marvel was loved for in the Sixties, innovations on old ideas which made them fresh again. Whenever another company revealed a character's secret identity, it was quickly explained away by some silly stunt or as a dream sequence. No so with Marvel and the Hulk. This facet of the character continues to create interesting story points. Everyone knows that Bruce Banner is a tragic figure plagued by his uncontrollable alter ego. Periodically scientists such as Reed Richards have tried to solve Banner's problem. John Byrne plans to play with this aspect of the dual personality and the public's awareness of this split nature to some length when he takes over the book.

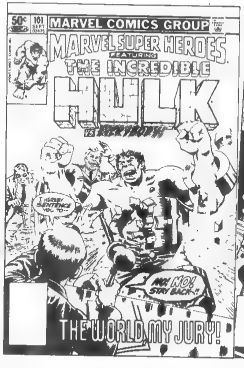
A MAJOR TITLE AGAIN

With issue 102, the magazine changed its name to **The Incredible Hulk** and the jolly green giant became the sole star of the book. The Sub-Mariner had bumped Giant Man from the lineup to become the co-feature in 70. Now he also moved into his own title which would last for a number of years before being cancelled for poor sales.

Entertaining a lot of people, the comic became a free-for-all as the Hulk's great strength (his only power, really) limited the story possibilities to fight fests. A good example is 125's "And Now, the Absorbing Man." Featuring some of Herb Trimpe's best work, it captures much of the style and action of the Kirby version of the Hulk of the Sixties.

Issue 140 (June '71) featured one of the more interesting stories of the series. Based on a plot by Harlan Ellison, it detailed the Hulk's journey into a microworld where he finds peace and happiness with a lovely lady, Jarella. The story is marred by Roy Thomas' ill-considered attempts at wit. Thomas worked the titles of Ellison's short stories into dialogue and captions at every opportunity, managing to annoy both the reader and Ellison. It's still worth reading, though. The story was a continuation of one begun in **Avengers 88**. Titled "In the Grip of Syklop" by Ellison, Thomas changed the villain's name to Psyklop and retitled the story, "The Brute that Shouted Love at the Heart of the Atom!" The adaptation follows Ellison's plot outline (published in **Marvelmania 4**, 1970) very closely. Thomas bends the captions and dialogue to work in Ellison titles as diverse as "Wanted in Surgery" and "Santa Claus vs. Spider," with as many as three to a page in the second half of the story. It becomes very distracting. An example is on page 12 when the Hulk is attacked by assassins who proclaim, "Repent Harlequin—," to which our hero responds, "—said the Ticktockman. Seems to me I read that someplace." Most are at least as insipid.

One of the more interesting and offbeat of the Hulk stories in recent years is "Feeding Billy" (**Hulk 222**, April '78). Written by Len Wein, it was plotted by Jim Starlin, who also did layouts. Finished art was by Alfredo Alcala. The story concerned two little children, Donnie and Marie, and their brother Billy, who's an atomic mutation. Much of the tale is the usual Hulk vs. the military and then hiding when he changes back to Banner routine. But there's a nice little four-page origin of the children and their brother leading up to meeting the cannibalistic mutant himself



THIS MARVEL COMIC COULD BE WORTH $2500 TO YOU!
MARVEL SUPER HEROES
THE INCREDIBLE
HULK
THE BRUTE THAT SHATTERED LIVES AT THE TOUCH OF THIS HAND!

The rest is predictable. But the counterpoint of the little children is effective and Alcala draws some of the most interesting facial expressions that the green goliath has ever sported, particularly on page 30.

THE SPECIALS

In 1968, the Hulk annuals started appearing irregularly. The first had a magnificent cover by Jim Steranko who drew the savage Hulk as he's meant to be—only he did the job too well. The facial grimace was so menacing that Marvel had Marie Severin&Frank Giacoia soften it lest it have been too frightening for children. It turned the ultimate Hulk illo into a travesty.

The best annual remains 7 (1978) in which the Angel and the Iceman assist the Hulk against the Master Mold of the Sentinels. Art by John Byrne and Bob Layton created a comic classic.

Hulk Annual 9 (1980) is also good as it's written by Doug Moench,and drawn by Steve Ditko who, along with Kirby, was one of the earliest Hulk artists back in 1962.

In 1977, Marvel began a black&white Hulk magazine which for 9 issues was a nostalgic delight. All of the stories took place after the demise of the original six issue run in 1963 but before the character's reappearance in **Avengers** 1. He fought Namor, the Metal Master, and even encountered the old Avengers as they looked shortly before the team was formed. Early issues had fine art by Walt Simonson, Alfredo Alcala and others.

But then **The Hulk** tv show began and the magazine shifted story focus back to the present day. It also changed from black & white to color with largely good results.

One of the best was 16 (Aug. '79). Written by Doug Moench, it features some of Mike Zeck's finest artwork. Inked by John Tartaglione, it shows how well Zeck can shine when he has the right inker. An occasional facial expression will come off as a bit odd (such as the double-page spread on 42-43), but for the most part it's excellent, particularly in coloration. The issue also features a weird Hulk frontispiece by Steve Bissette and six nice full page illoes by Rudy Nebres.

Issue 19 featured three stories, the third a touched-up reprinting of a nine-page short which originally ran in the back of issue 147 (Jan. '72) of the regular series. "Heaven Is a Very Small Place!" was written by Roy Thomas and drawn by Herb Trimpe and John Severin. It's a touching little fable about the Hulk encountering an old town in the middle of the desert. In this mythical place no one is afraid of the Hulk.

Issue 23 of the magazine was written by Jim Shooter with art by John Buscema & Alfredo Alcala. This issue aroused controversy at the time. It features a scene where Bruce Banner is threatened with rape in a YMCA shower until he convinces his assailants what would happen if they try to carry out their threat. For some reason, Alcala's inking in this sequence makes Banner, a middle-aged man, appear to be about seventeen.

THE HULK ON TV

The Hulk television series, which began in 1977, ran for 82 episodes (although early shows broken up into 2-parters add a couple more). Instead of Bruce (a name **never** used for a macho tv series lead), the scientist became David Banner. The show was similar to **The Fugitive** with Banner, who's believed to be dead, on the run, hiding and looking for a cure for the radiation-induced affliction which causes him to turn into the Hulk twice each episode. It would have been more logical to go to a scientific complex and confess his problem. He certainly accomplished nothing on the road.

Starring Bill Bixby as Banner and Lou Ferrigno as the Hulk, it was a well-written,

THE INCREDIBLE HULK!
BOOM
I KNOW YOU'D COME BACK HERE, HULK! YOU'RE THE PLACE YOU'RE MOST MASTERFUL
THE PLACE WHERE THE HULK WAS BORN, THE PLACE WHERE HE WAS FORCED TO BECOME BRUCE BANNER'S ULTIMATE FOE!
HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS AND SEE BRUCE BANNER
BANNER

YOU KNOW IT!
WHAMMM!
HULK IS NOT BANNER!
BRAHMA
BANNER CONCENTRATE! TRY TO TAKE CONTROL
WHEN YOU'RE NO LONGER THE MINDLESS IMMUNISTIC HULK
BANNER, DON'T DO THAT! LIVE TO BE AWARE OF THE SUNSHINE!
CRASH!

formula-ridden series. Writers who worked on the show describe how Bixby came to dislike Ferigno just as his character hated the Hulk. Writers who wanted to do shows centering on the Hulk rather than Banner were turned down by order of the series star, Bixby. Only the producer, Kenneth Johnson, could push through such an idea. He did, in the opening episode of the fourth season, the two-part story "Prometheus," about radiations from a meteor which trap the Hulk midway between human and bestial form. Still a top-rated show in its fourth and final season, it was cancelled because the network couldn't deal with problems caused by the series star. The network felt those problems great enough to outweigh the advantages of continuing to produce the show. No other network could figure out how to copy the hit. It was regarded as a freak show and its success regarded as a fluke. Writers for the show found themselves typecast and out of work when the run ended.

A RETURN TO LOST GREATNESS

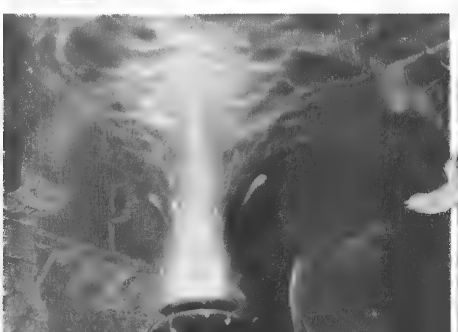
The comic book continued along much as before. Issue 249 (July '80) was an average issue uplifted by Steve Ditko art.

Issue 286 (Aug. '83), titled "Hero," attracted the wrong kind of attention when writer Bill Mantlo was caught with his hand in Harlan Ellison's cookie jar. When Ellison pointed out to Marvel that the story bore an uncanny resemblance to his **Outer Limits** teleplay, "Soldier," they quickly rectified the error and issued a stern advisory to their writers not to do unauthorized adaptations of published or broadcast works.

The biggest news in the world of the Hulk is that following a crossover story in **Alpha Flight**, John Byrne will take over the writing and art chores on the title. His intent is to return to the pure, creative roots established by Lee&Kirby so many years before in 1962. After reviving the Fantastic Four with similar tactics, the Hulk should now prosper under his firm guiding hand.

CF

Continued From Page 17



Two scenes from Disney's Black Cauldron.

dumb baby bear in Chuck Jones's few Warner Brothers bear family cartoons. One of his immortal lines in that series was "C-A-T...dog! B-A-T...Rhode Island!"

Other voice talents includes Joanne Worley (**Laugh-In**), Bill Scott, Henry Gibson and Alan Oppenheimer.

AND ON THE WIDE SCREEN

In the meantime, Disney's feature animation production continues unabated. Work is now underway on their 26th full-length animated movie, **Basil of Baker Street.**

Based on a novel by Eve Titus, **Basil** is a comedy-fantasy chronicling the extraordinary adventures of a little furry rodent (i.e. mouse) version of Sherlock Holmes. With his assistant, Dr. Dawson, they attempt to thwart a diabolical scheme by mousedom's number one criminal, Professor Ratigan, in Victorian England.

Basil of Baker Street stars the vocal talents of Vincent Price (as Professor Ratigan), Barrie Ingham (Basil), Val Bettin (Dr. Dawson) and Diana Chesney (Mrs. Judson). The directors are Burny Mattinson, Dave Michener and John Musker. Four time Academy Award-winning composer Henry Mancini has been set to compose the film's score.

Basil of Baker Street is tentatively scheduled for a summer of '87 release. Coming up this summer, in June to be exact, is Disney's 25th animated film, **The Black Cauldron.**

Budgeted at $25 million, **The Black Cauldron** is a fantasy epic rooted in Welsh mythology and based on Lloyd Alexander's Newbery Award-winning series of five books.

The film details the heroic exploits of a young assistant pigkeeper named Taran who must prevent the evil Horned King from gaining possession of the Black Cauldron, a dark object which houses forces capable of producing an army of deathless warriors. Taran is aided in his quest by his mentor Dallben, an enchantress named Princess Ellonwy, a furry creature called Gurgi and Hen Wen, an oracular pig.

The voice artists in this film include John Hurt (The Horned King), Grant Beardsley (Taran), John Byner (Gurgi), Susan Sheridan (Eilonwy), Freddie Jones (Dallben), Nigel Hawthorne (Ffiewddur Fflam) and Phil Fondacaro (as the Creeper).

Under the supervision of producer Joe Hale and a team of veteran Disney directors (Ted Berman, Richard Rich and Art Stevens), a revitalized and enthusiastic animation department produced what Hale considers to be Disney's most ambitious animated project since **Pinocchio.** More than 200 employees worked fulltime on the large-scale project, including 68 animators and assistant animators. This will be the first Disney cartoon since **Sleeping Beauty** (1959) to be shot in 70mm.

The Black Cauldron is only one of three films being released by Disney this summer but it is the one they will doubtless be paying the closest attention to. This is because Disney is touting **The Black Cauldron** as the return to their more classic animation style, the approach not used since the Forties.

While the studio's 1981 **The Fox And The Hound** is its most financially successful cartoon feature, it lacked something. Critical acclaim. None of the features made since the late Fifties have captured the hearts of moviegoing audiences the way that the Disney "classics" did. Re-releases of **Snow White** or **Pinocchio**, which were made over forty years ago, not only do well at the boxoffice but garner unvarnished critical praise. It happened again last December when **Pinocchio** was

The hero meets his "Princess" on the way to the Cauldron

reissued and it was one of the only films released that month which proved to be an unqualified success. Thus, when Disney releases a new animated feature it is invariably measured against their own highly regarded classics. This time it is the studio which is comparing **The Black Cauldron** to the style of bygone days, which will only encourage cynical critics to examine this latest entry with a gimlet eye. I know I will.

* * * *

Producer Joe Hale has already gone out on a limb by saying "I really think that this will be the film that animated films in the future will be judged by. That may sound conceited or self-important, but it's what I believe."

Hale has been with Disney for many years and has an extensive background in layout. "When you see **The Black Cauldron**, you'll see that this is more of a layout film. From the time these boards were started I said to keep the camera back. Show this world that we're bringing people into. If you want to see a lot of closeups you can watch television."

But animation is only half the fight. Will the film tell a story which people will find engaging? Other than the roughhousing breakthroughs made by Ralph Bakshi in the Seventies, cartoon stories have not strayed from the predictable or the harmless.

"It is a fantasy and an adventure story," Hale explains, "but it also has humor while still being very frightening in parts. It's more frightening than the climax of **Sleeping Beauty**. We tried to keep a balance. I didn't want to make a film which was dark and heavy all the way through. We tried to balance it with lighter moments and charcters who are humorous. I didn't want to make a picture that was just a babysitter where people drop their kids off at one o'clock and say that they'll pick them up at three. I wanted something that adults, teenagers and kids could enjoy."

DISNEY ANIMATION-A NEW OLD LOOK

Animation from all the major studios has come under criticism in recent years. Cartoons made for television are created by what is known as "limited animation" (which uses fewer drawings per movement). Feature-length animation has become increasingly plagued by this process as well. One of the trends has been to draw characters which lack detail. Hale admits that Disney had suffered from these problems in recent years as well.

"On **Robin Hood** and **The Aristocats**, the effects were very simple. We almost didn't have any effects department then, we were down to three or four people in that capacity. I think that this was because the producer of those films had a background in animation and those who worked closest with him on his films were animators. Animators always like closeups. They like to show you the expressions that they can get on characters."

Another good sign is that the people involved with **Cauldron** are being influenced by the breakthroughs of others.

"I try to see everything that's animated," Hale reveals. "With Ralph Bakshi's films there's always something that is worth seeing from an artistic standpoint. He's the one guy not afraid to try something completely different. He'll mix things up and go from a painted background to a background that's a photograph to live action footage.

"Ralph wants to make really good animated films. He's had a lot of the people that I have working now on **Black Cauldron**. It seems as though Ralph wants to do everything himself and he just can't keep people. He wants to have so much input into his own films, but somehow they just don't have the right story sense. I think that he gets too caught up in the visuals."

Hale insists that they've learned not only from the mistakes of others, but from Disney's as well.

"We are trying to make a better film than we've made in the past." And yet the character designs themselves are not really that different. "There's a certain type of animated character that works in features. Some people say, well, your characters really don't look that different from those in **The Sword In The Stone.** But this type of animation has evolved over fifty years of trial and error. I've worked on almost every type of animated film you could mention. You get a pretty good idea of what works as far as style goes. You try doing different types of characters but you have to have characters that you can sustain for an hour and twenty minutes."

Hale promises that there will be more lifelike detail to the characters in this film than in any animated feature in recent years.

"The story of **The Black Cauldron** demands more realistic characters," he says. "You can't have a little cartoon character battling the Horned King. The animation is so detailed that the audiences will be convinced that they're watching flesh-and-blood characters in lethal predicaments. We'll make people laugh and we'll make 'em cry in this one."

One hopes that they won't be laughing at the story or crying over what the film could have been. **CF**

Continued From Page 19

find the omnipotent and all-destroying infinity, while confronting the ominous Silent One; the death goddess Hela; and Karnilla—beautiful queen of the Norns who guide the fates of men and gods alike (Thor 184-188, Jan.-May 1971). Thor's confrontation with Hela continued, leading gradually to a war with the Trolls and a journey to the Well at the World's End (Thor 194, Dec. 1971). His battle set the stage for the second epic, in which Asgard fell before the powerful Mangog. Odin apparently died, Pluto battled Hela for control of the land of the dead, and Loki's machinations promised to bring on Ragnarok, the doom of the gods (Thor 200, June 1972).

Meanwhile, The Fantastic Four battled a mentally powerful invader from beyond the stars called the Overmind, who possessed Reed Richards' mind and thus forced our heroes to turn to their arch-foe, Dr. Doom, for aid and leadership (FF113-116, Aug.-Nov. 1971). Lastly in what was virtually Lee's parting shot as a writer of comic books, an interplanetary herald called Gabriel the Airwalker announced the return of Galactus, setting up a battle that would involve the Silver Surfer, a witch named Agatha Harkness, and all the nations of Earth (FF 120-123, Mar.-June 1972). With competent art by John Buscema and Joe Sinnot, these were entertaining stories and a fitting farewell to the old days of Marvel.

At the same time Roy Thomas was attempting—true to form—a far more ambitious handling of the Marvel universe. Beginning with a minor guest appearance by Captain Marvel and one of the robotic Sentries of the alien Kree (**Avengers** 89, July 1971), Thomas used his Avengers to weave what he intended to be the largest scale, most profound cosmic saga ever in comics. The following issues unveiled a Kree plot to reduce Homo sapiens to the savagery of our ancient ancestors. At the same time, several venerable Avengers began acting suspiciously, until the crime-fighting group was abruptly disbanded (**Avengers** 92, Oct. 1971). In an ingenious twist, Thomas revealed that certain Avengers were actually imposters sent by the shape-shifting alien Skrulls as a ploy to conceal a galactic Kree-Skrull war in which Earth, like some

HMM! ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE ANCIENT HEROES FROM THE PAST!
SUPERHUMAN STRENGTH! I'VE GOT IT! I'LL BREAK THE CHAIN!
I'LL TRY TO CONCENTRATE ON THE MEMORIES OF THE ONE WHO WAS THE GOLDEN AVENGER!
YES, HOW CONCENTRATE, RICK JONES—THINK OF THEM—AND NOTHING ELSE!
THUNDER AND THE SUNS OF CREATION! I'M... I'M THE GOLDEN AVENGER!
CAPTAIN EASY—HE HAS TO BE HERE SOMEWHERE!
BUT WHERE IS HE? WHERE?
ARE WE RICKS TO REVIVE EVEN THE MIGHTY AVENGERS?
YOU MEAN THE ONES I BOTH READ ABOUT IN THOSE OLD COMIC MAGS? ...KIND OF THE OMNIMAGES?
I...AM? I DON'T THINK SO!
...AND THERE, ROARING TO GET OUT THEIR WAY!
UH-WHAT'S HAPPENED ANYWAY?

Rick Jones revives the Golden Age.

Polynesian island in World War II, would be devastated just because it happened to be in the way. With issue 93 (Nov. 1971) regular artist Sal Buscema was replaced by Neal Adams. With the aid of Tom Palmer's inks, Adams brought tremendous force, beauty and believability to Thomas's far-ranging storyline. Adams's first job was to make a micro-cosmos of the android Vision's insides, as Ant Man made a fantastic voyage through his colleague in search of a key to the mysterious events surrounding them. Next, the plot led to the Great Refuge in the Himalayas, where the Kree-Skrull war was involving the Inhumans. Adams continued the same blend of humanity and oddity first apparent in their own series of a few months earlier (**Avengers** 95, Jan. 1972).

The climax of the war must stand as the consummate unification of Roy Thomas's unique vision. The Avengers journey to the Kree homeworld to encounter the Supreme Intelligence: the disembodied, combined minds of all the Kree's greatest thinkers. Realizing that the war must end, the Supreme Intelligence grants temporary mental powers to Rick Jones, who shares the time/space continuum with the Kree's Captain Marvel. From Jones's mind there springs an army of superheroes from Timely Comics' Golden Age: The Fin, The Blazing Skull, the original Vision, the Patriot, the old Angel, the Human Torch, Captain America and the Sub-Mariner. In an odd and rather arbitrary finale, all of Thomas's most evident concerns—cosmic scope, the Marvel universe, the Golden Age of comics, and a hip teenager—are fused into a single plot twist (**Avengers** 97, Mar. 1972).

The Kree-Skrull war combined the greatest mythopoeic aspirations of fandom's favorite writer with some of the most atypical and ambitious work of its favorite artist. The story was immediately hailed as a masterpiece. Unfortunately, as inventively plotted and beautifully drawn as it was, the saga suffered from Thomas's determination to make the prose as profound as the storyline. At every opportunity he crammed deep meditations into the mouth of whichever character Adams had penciled into the panel. Most of these speeches were at once pretentious and silly. During one action sequence, for example, when Ant Man sees one of his ants killed, he reflects, "Human beings are funny—they think no living things but themselves capable of feeling pain. That's because they've never heard an ant scream. Well, I have,"

continues Ant Man, "and it's a sound to haunt a lifetime worth of dreams! A sound like lost souls in torment or the wailing of a forsaken child. I don't ever want to hear that sound again—not EVER!"

The writing also abounded in contemporary references; the ant who was killed was named Crosby, to go with its partners Stills and Nash, while Iron Man comments on the story by saying "I've seen a lot more than fire and rain in my time . . . but **this** . . . (**Avengers** 93, Jan. 1972).

Thomas's stories exemplified the curse of serious comics in the 1970s: in striving to tackle grandiose subject matter, the young writers of the time utilized a prose style that was distractingly ponderous, overwritten and unsuited to the medium. There were exceptions, of course, which we'll discuss in a later installment.

A more symbolic approach to cosmic adventures came with the return of Dr. Strange in **Marvel Premiere** (issue 3, July 1972). After a period of many **Strange** writers and artists, Steve Englehart and Frank Brunner joined forces to recast the sorcerous hero as a brooding, eloquent explorer of dark, Lovecraftian nether realms (**Marvel Premiere** 9, July 1973). Their most notable work came when Strange regained his own title. It was a twisting, unsettling journey into a topsy-turvy world within a crystal ball, in which Strange encountered and withstood Death himself (**Doctor Strange** 1-5, June-Dec. 1974). Englehart kept the story vivid and surprising, while Brunner's art—bold and atmospheric, reminiscent of Neal Adams'—was well suited to the material. But Brunner soon after left the comics field and was replaced by Gene Colan. Though Colan's art was effective, the stories increasingly grew less interesting. **Dr. Strange** had lost most of its original pizzazz by the late 1970s.

Another title dominated by Englehart, **Captain America**, was the series which most successfully and playfully enriched the Marvel cosmos. Just prior to Englehart's stewardship, Gary Friedrich had written a long story set against a relevant backdrop of racial hatred and agitation in the ghetto. Friedrich pulled off a fascinating unification of Marvel's secret armies and criminal organizations of the 1960s: The Supreme Hydra proves to be the son of the crime czar the Kingpin, while Hydra and affiliated cabals turn out to be controlled by that master Nazi schemer, the Red Skull (**Captain America** 147, Mar. 1972).

Englehart was able to illuminate the characters of Captain America and the Falcon themselves. Promptly after taking over the series, he introduced a sinister Cap, complete with Golden Age sidekick Bucky Barnes, who seemed determined to destroy the legitimate shield-bearer. After capturing Cap and the Falcon, the imposter reveals that, as a youth in the Forties, he fanatically idolized Captain America. After Cap's disappearance in 1944 (when he was frozen into the ice from which the Avengers would later free him), the deranged young man found chemical and surgical means to make himself an exact duplicate of his hero, and found a boy he could train to be a sidekick. The imposter's own fanatical jingoism, however, drove him to acts of crazy violence during the McCarthy era, to the point where the government had to place him in suspended animation. After being revived by an anti-communist maniac, the bogus Cap and Bucky rush out to dispose of the liberalized Cap of the present, while mopping up the Reds in their own style (**Captain America** 155, Nov. 1972). In the following issue the ersatz superpatriot is devastated when he learns that his foe is not some commie-symp imitation created in the 1970s but the real hero of his youth, whose con-

sciousness has been raised during his sojourn in our modern world. In the end the real Cap solemnly meditates on his ideals, wondering what would have happened if he "had had the fatal flaw that would have driven him to super-patriotism, madness and mayhem?" Englehart thus managed to solve a riddle of Marvel continuity: how could Cap have been frozen in 1944, as portrayed in the **Avengers**, when as veteran comic collectors knew there had been a brief run of Captain America stories in the early 1950s? Englehart also conveyed a few fashionable political opinions in a highly entertaining and well-scripted story.

The culmination of Englehart's politically relevant material was the revelation that the head of the evil Secret Empire was really the president of the USA. This led to a collapse of Cap's faith in the nation he symbolized, and ultimately to his resignation from the superhero grind (**Captain America** 176, Aug. 1974). After letting the Falcon fight alone for a few issues, Cap returned with a new identity as Nomad, "a man without a country" (following a charming scene in which he designs, cuts and sews his new costume, and tosses out ten possible names for himself ranging from "The Freebooter" to "The Vagrant"). An overenthusiastic teenager then declares himself the new Cap and is killed by the Red Skull, whereupon the real CA reaffirms his destiny and abandons the irresponsible identity of Nomad (**Captain America** 183, March 1975). The ensuing battle with the Skull, however, brings another revelation: the Falcon himself is a pawn, in part even a creation, of the Nazi villain (**Captain America** 186, June 1975).

Revelations and hidden connections such as these would later become stock Marvel devices, destined to be carried to obsessive lengths. But Englehart's ideas were fresh and entertaining enough to interest even readers who were not born and bred in the Marvel universe.

Cap's fascinating continuity was abruptly broken off in late 1975, when Jack Kirby returned to Marvel after his contract at DC expired. For the most part, Kirby would create new titles, but he did want to once again tackle the

Marvel hoped that more than one hero would succeed where a lone hero failed—thus Cap met the Falcon and DD paired with the Black Widow.

character he'd helped create in 1941. Unfortunately, his contemporary bent for unrestrained slugfests and interdimensional adventure proved inappropriate for the hero. After he left in 1977, various writers—Thomas, Gerber, Don Glut, Roger McKenzie, Chris Claremont and others—tried to re-establish the complexity and mystery of Englehart's tenure, but there were too many cooks for a consistently palatable broth.

Englehart also enjoyed an acclaimed, subplot-rich stint on **Avengers** from issue 105 (Nov. 1972) to 152 (Oct. 1976). He shook up the membership roster frequently, cutting Hawkeye and adding a mysterious Vietnamese heroine named Mantis (whose slowly unravelling origin would be a dominant subplot for a year and a half). Englehart then re-introduced her friend the Swordsman, an arrogant ex-villain. He later added the once-relevant Cat and a formerly dead hero named Wonder Man. He also invented a surprising new origin for the Vision (**Avengers** 134-135, Apr.-May 1975) and married him to the Scarlet Witch, although this did not end the long agony of their melodramatic relationship.

A persistent problem with Englehart was symptomatic of most continuity-minded writers of the 1970s. In focusing on subplots and personal development he seemed to bring far less care and imagination to bear on the actual adventures. While his character work was probably the most ingenious the field had yet produced, his villains and plots had neither the slam-bang fun of early Marvel nor the inventive finesse of Silver Age DC. Too many of his stories encouraged the reader to merely skim them, looking for the subplots.

Englehart was also plagued by irregular and substandard art. Sal Buscema did steady work with him on **Captain America** (though the Nomad sequence was primarily the work of Frank Robbins), but **The Avengers** was handled over a four-year period by Rich Buckler, George Tuska, Jim Starlin, Don Heck, Dave Cockrum, Sal Buscema, George Perez, Keith Pollard and Bob Brown. Almost all were badly inked. As usual, the rule seemed to be that the least inspired artist had the longest run. After Englehart, the series was passed to the hands of many more artists and

Four for the price of one!

fewer than nine writers before the decade stumbled to a close.

The rest of the marvel mainstream was far less interesting. Apart from expanding and complicating the company's universe, attempts to change and mature the line centered on more ambitious emotional developments. The prime movers in this direction were Roy Thomas and his frequent colleague Gerry Conway, who were presumably trying to remain true to Stan Lee's original philosophy but whose products generally felt contrived and unsatisfying.

Thomas's principal target was **Fantastic Four**. Reed and Sue were forced to become bitter enemies and sue for divorce; the Torch lost his beloved Crystal to the Avengers' Quicksilver; the Thing's manhood was threatened by the obnoxious Thundra, a product of the comics' fling with women's lib. After redundant, excessive soap opera, Thomas's successor Conway (with artist Rich Buckler doing a fun imitation of early Kirby) wrapped up the loose ends and tried to get back to the straightforward entertainment format. But the inspiration had somehow dissipated.

For the rest of the 1970s the FF enjoyed competent stories and attractive, house-style art, but not much more.

With **Spiderman**, Conway tried to keep the subplots lively and surprising. But he and his successors ultimately took them to the point of absurdity. For instance, Peter Parker's girlfriend Gwen is killed by the Green Goblin, then returns as a clone and finally leaves Parker to find herself. The series was further marred by hasty-looking Ross Andru art, inked by all the wrong people. Even worse, Parker's writers in the 1970s seemed unable to distinguish between pathos and bathos: in place of the troubled but always resilient and determined Peter Parker of the early days, one was faced with a whiner unable to essay or even accept any of life's challenges. A number of Marvel heroes would undergo weakening in their characters during the deluge of emotionalism in those years. It was as if the young writers, having just made the jump up from fandom, lost sight of the concept of heroism and used their beloved characters to fight internalized, emotional wars of their own.

Conway was more effective with **Daredevil**, putting him through a jet set love affair with the dashing Black Widow and relocating the hero to San Francisco, making him the first Marvel hero to live outside of New York (**Daredevil** 87. May 1972). Aided by the sensitive, sophisticated art of Gene Colan, he was able to create a generally convincing adult relationship between the two heroes; Steve Gerber, who followed Conway on the book, brought even finer nuances into the scripting by highlighting the lovers' differing attitudes toward crimefighting, partnership and love. Colan departed, however, followed soon by Gerber, and the series was shuffled among noncommittal writers and artists until it became one of Marvel's worst.

Other Marvel titles fared similarly. **Iron Man** was handled by a variety of second-string staffers and, except for some fine art by John Romita Jr. and Bob Layton at the end of the decade, was generally neglected. **The Incredible Hulk** enjoyed more stability with long writing stints by Thomas, Wein and Roger Stern and solid art by Herb Trimpe until 1975. Sal Buscema took Hulk into the 1980s; but the character's limitations became increasingly more apparent, particularly when the success of the Hulk television series in 1978 discouraged experimentation. **Thor** also continued at a steady but unexciting pace as first Conway, then Wein, then Thomas strove vainly to maintain the epic flavor of the late 1960s. John Buscemá slugged along as artist for nine years.

Gradually, what had opened as an exciting decade of new frontiers became an endurance test for creators and readers alike. As flawed as they were in various ways, the developments of the early 1970s had kept Marvel's superheroes alive and interesting. But by 1974 the company seemed content to let its major titles ride on their earlier successes, downplaying experimentation in favor of proven formulas. The bulk of Marvel's comics seemed suited only for the already committed Marvelite. The fan looking for vitality and innovation was forced to turn to less staid, experimental titles. CF

EXCERPTED FROM THE COMIC BOOK **HEROES**, PUBLISHED BY CROWN BOOKS

Yet every month there does appear a new comic title which has the potential of developing into a collectible item. Each year there are always four or five books that will indeed make real money for their buyers—and that is what the next column is about: How To Recognize The Potentially Valuable New Comic.

****

Besides investments, prices and speculation, this column will also be covering such other important areas of collecting as preserving and organizing your collection, how to find and sell valuable comic books and how to get greater enjoyment from **collecting** comics for fun and profit.

Just to get started, let's talk a little about that primary paraphernalia of the comic collector's repertoire: plastic bags. (Mylar, Mylites and all their variations are another subject altogether, and more about them later.)

The reason plastic bags first came onto the collecting scene in the late 1960s was simple enough: It gave comic book dealers something to stick a price sticker onto.

When I was collecting back in the mid-1960s, dealers penciled the price of a comic on the back cover or the first page of the comic. This was okay since most "valuable" books at that time were selling for only $2 to $5.

As comic books increased in price, collectors objected to prices written on covers. And as comics became more valuable, there was more concern that they not become ragged and worn when on display. Enter the plastic bag.

Today plastic bags are still in wide use by dealers at conventions and at retail stores where books need to be protected from the general public.

The point is: plastic bags are a **dealer's** nicety. Collectors have no business using them.

I am amazed that collectors go through and put plastic bags on all their comics. What are they doing? For the most part, they are the only people who will be handling their books. And if you have your books stored carefully away, even that handling is minimal.

Plastic bags must be replaced at a maximum of every two years, otherwise they decompose and actually start to harm the comic. Fortunately since most dealers' stock turns over every six months to three years, this is not a serious problem for them.

But for a collector to wrap his comics up in an unstable plastic compound that gives off and entraps harmful vapors is pure stupidity—especially if such comics are stored away for several years.

If you can't afford Mylar (and most collectors can't—at least for the newer and less expensive books), then leave your comics naked. Stack your unbagged books in a cool dark place or in an acid-free box.

There is no reason for a collector to ever buy a single plastic bag unless you are displaying your comic to the buying public.

And now that you saved some money on bags, why don't you buy some more comics? Now that's the kind of advice I know you like to hear! **CF**

Mike Benton is the author of **Comic Book Collecting for Fun and Profit**, from Crown Publishers

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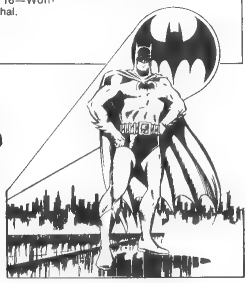

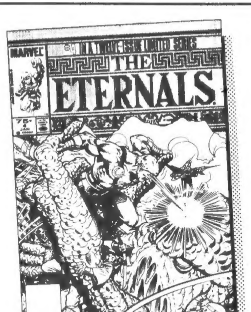

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Publishers Picks

Ok. Ok. I'll give in. When I reviewed every Marvel comic book last issue, I thought that it would buy me a bit of breathing space. This time around, the column would only touch on a couple of highlights of the field and leave it go at that. But both letters and voices around the office have been hollerin' that there's just too much Marvel and not enough DC in the issue. Guess who was picked to rectify the imbalance? And so I spent the weekend reading DC comics in preparation for this revealing piece of sparkling prose. Then I was told that we were going to color on the page and I would have less space than normal. Thus a quick look at what's left of the DC Universe...

DC COMICS PRESENTS, BEST OF DC DIGEST, TALES OF THE TEEN TITANS, DEADMAN, G.I. COMBAT, TALES OF THE LEGION OF SUPERHEROES and **SHOWCASE** are either reprint or vary so much from issue to issue that they simply cannot be commented on.

STAR TREK and **V** are not their creations and **WHO'S WHO** is simply not the sort of book that you can really review. Which brings us to the meat of the company.

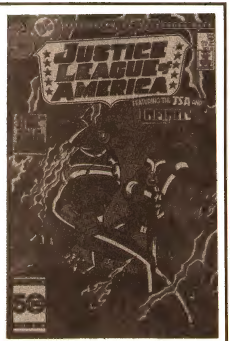
VIGILANTE IS USUALLY OK. Just ok. I would rather be reading a novel of Mack Bolan or Eclipse's **CROSSFIRE**. Give the book to a writer that knows what to do with this kind of story—sorry Marv.

HEX—Does George Miller know about this? A poor man's **MAD MAX**—very poor.

BATMAN and **DETECTIVE**—These two have to be treated together. The only difference is that one has the Green Arrow in back. They are both very good books. Moench really seems to know what he is doing with this character. Maybe he should try his hand at the Vigilante? The creature of the night rarely looked better than he has under the latest crop of artists and the stories are complex and interesting. Drop the backup though.

SUPERMAN and **ACTION**—Another pair of titles. The difference—Clark still has a job in one although not in the other. Williamson has added some nice inks to an otherwise directionless mess.

JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA—What they are trying to do with this one became brutally apparent with their special crossover issue. The main meeting of teams is not with the JSA as it has been in the past but with Infinity Inc., a group of teenage superdoers. The book is simply not what it used to be—no longer a teaming of the premier heroes. If you want to read a good JLA story, buy Marvel's **SQUADRON SUPREME**.



SWAMP THING—If it is possible for a comic book to have an opposite, this is it. Amethyst is light and fun and makes you feel good—after you read this one you feel like you need a bath. I know that it is supposed to be horror, but really.

CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS—A year ago, Marvel discovered that if they did a book which concerned all of their heroes, major and minor, and had a lasting impact on their comic universe for all time to come (or at least promised to do so), that everyone would beat a path to their door. DC is using the better mousetrap to achieve the same result. This really is an important series that affects its heroes in a big way—if you die, after all, that is a major change in your career. Whole alternate worlds will disappear, and when this series concludes everything will be different. If you care at all about DC, then you are already reading this. Wolfman is creating a convoluted but fascinating story.

NATHANIEL DUSK is quite good and this time around you can even see the art. Although it is still not inked it is much clearer. The story is just as good as last time; this author knows his mysteries.

ALL-STAR SQUADRON and **INFINITY INC** present Roy Thomas' tales of the DC Universe that almost was. This is what we would have had if superhero popularity had not died out in the late '40s. But they did and somehow that seems to rob the stories of their air of reality—even comic book reality.

AMETHYST—A lyrical fantasy well worth the reading and rereading. With Colon back on the art it should get better and better. Don't miss it.

FURY OF FIRESTORM, ARAK, OMEGA MEN and **ARION** just leave me cold. The art in these is worse than amateur most of the time and the stories are limp.

BLUE DEVIL bucks the trend at both major companies. The book presents the only new character worth reading that has come along in quite some time. It is not always well-drawn, but is consistently written well with characterizations that are always fun. B.D. is a guy you would actually want to know, who has adventures that are worth recounting.

BATMAN AND THE OUTSIDER—I am finally getting used to the fact that Aparo is missing. The new artist is good, but I have missed Jim. Good stories, interesting characters. I am looking forward to the companion **OUTSIDERS**.

GREEN LANTERN—This is not Englehart at his best. It is pretty good, but something seems to be missing. Same for Staton's art, only more so.

WARLORD—Are you absolutely desperate to read one of ERB's Pellucidar stories in comic book form and don't care how diluted it is. . .

WONDER WOMAN isn't bad, but it probably won't be around for too much longer.

A few conclusions can be drawn from this and last issue's columns: at the moment, creative juices are not flowing well at either major comic book publisher. There are few unusual or interesting new concepts; bad books outnumber the good. DC still seems to have the most interesting characters with Blue Devil, Amethyst, Superman, Batman, Green Lantern and Wonder Woman, but they do not seem to know what to do with them. DC is slightly behind Marvel in the average level of writing quality. But DC art quality has dropped below the competent amateur level on a great number of titles. What must be remembered here is that, with the institution of partial royalty payment, and with the far greater numbers at which Marvel titles sell, it is far, far more lucrative to work at Marvel than it is to work at DC. There are one or two exceptions, such as the **Teen Titans** book, but that is the rule. Royalties are normally paid on copies sold over the 100,000 mark. The average sale for DC comics in 1983 was 97,434, which dipped to 89,314 in 1984. Thus, according to latest figures supplied by DC Comics and the audit bureau, DC pays no royalties on their average titles. Marvel, on the other hand, averaged 187,123 in 1983 and 181,773 in 1984, with no titles falling below the 100,000 copy mark. Marvel pays royalties on every single title they publish. By way of comparing the current status of the two companies, consider that the only comic book not published by Marvel that is selling over 150,000 copies is . . . **Archie Comics Digest**!

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